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TopGear
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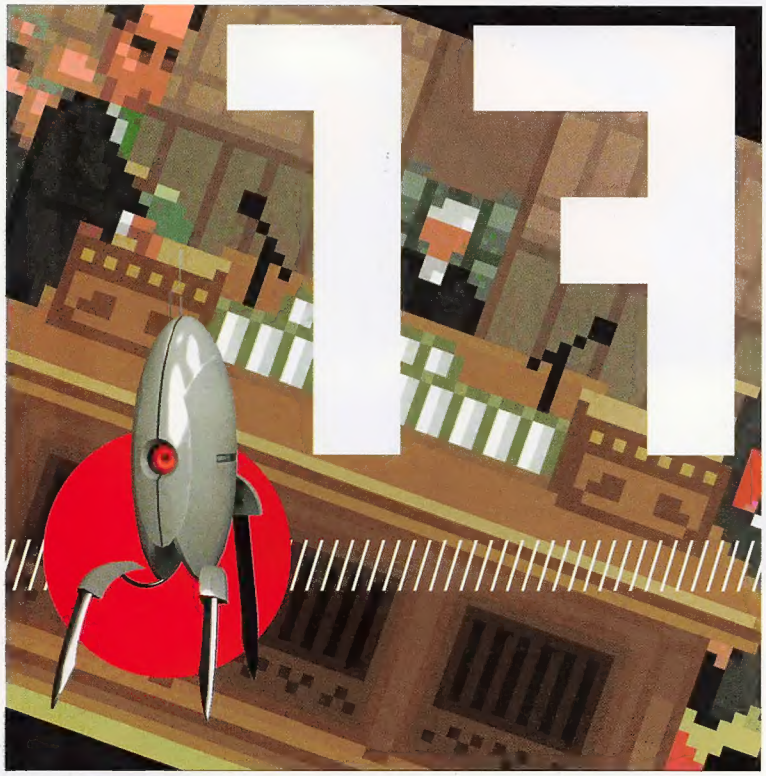

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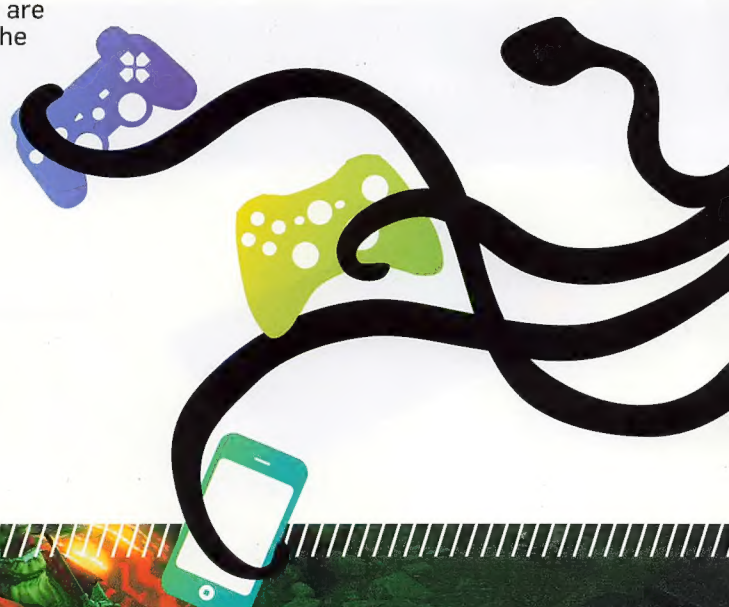

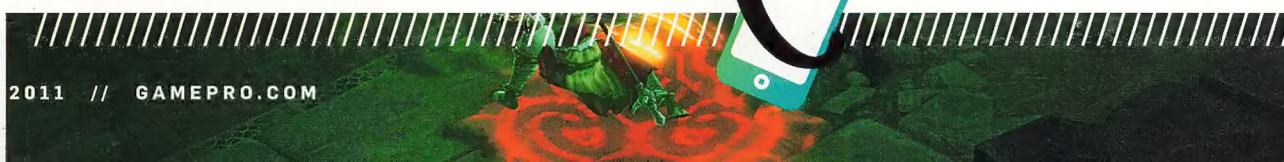

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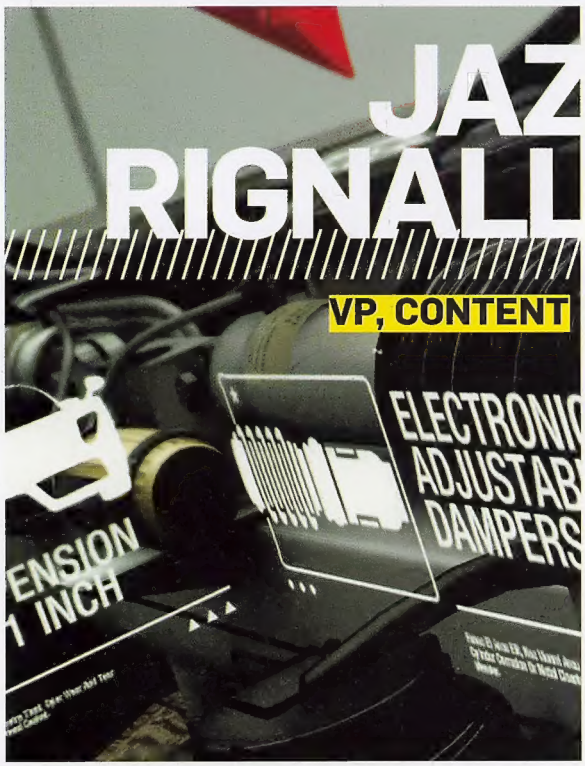
EDITOR'S LETTER

GAMEPRO WINTER QUARTERLY 2011



One thing I see and hear regularly about magazines is "Why do I need news, reviews, and previews months after I've seen them online?" And that's something I totally agree with, which is why this all-new quarterly magazine doesn't follow that "traditional" magazine formula.

The relaunch of *GamePro* has given us the chance to break the mold and create something different from most other publications that I hope still feels relevant—and not just different for the sake of it. Instead of trying desperately to compete against an Internet that is current and cutting edge, we're using the extended time we have when producing a magazine to pool ideas, thoughts, and concepts and go deep on subjects, rather than try to be timely. And to be able to pick and choose what we cover—not be dictated to by release schedules and product marketing.

That's why the front of this book, normally occupied by news stories, is now a collection of interesting opinions, facts, figures, and stuff that we hope will be an entertaining and topical read. The previews section doesn't really read like a previews section of old. In the past, we would have had lots of details about games that can quickly and easily be found on Wikipedia or a manufacturer's website. Instead, we're talking about our favorite up-and-coming games based on why we're excited about them. Because to me, it's the personal insights and perspective that matter—not the facts and figures, which you can look up on the Web if what we're talking about sounds interesting to you.

Even our reviews aren't quite reviews. They're snapshots about what we're playing right now. Not necessarily the latest games—although there's plenty of new stuff in there. Instead, we thought it might be interesting for you to read about what people who can play anything they want choose to play in their spare time. I think that makes for more honest and genuine editorial, as it's ultimately dictated by personal choice, rather than a marketing schedule.

And then there are our features, which are probably the most traditional part of the magazine. But even then, we're trying to do something a little different. We're looking forward and backward, trying to tie franchises, games, or even types of characters together in a way that we hope will pique your interest and deliver a new perspective. We want to cover things you think you might know, but tell you things you might not know about them—or best of all, show you stuff you didn't know about, but once you've read it, you're glad you now do.

So there we have it: Our new-look, different-reading *GamePro Quarterly*. I really hope you enjoy it. And if you do, our next edition will be out on newsstands in March.

Hope to see you then—or perhaps before that at GamePro.com.

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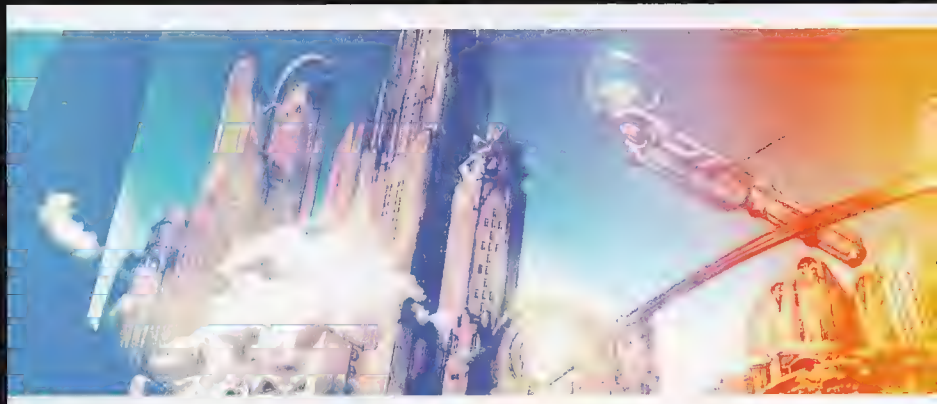

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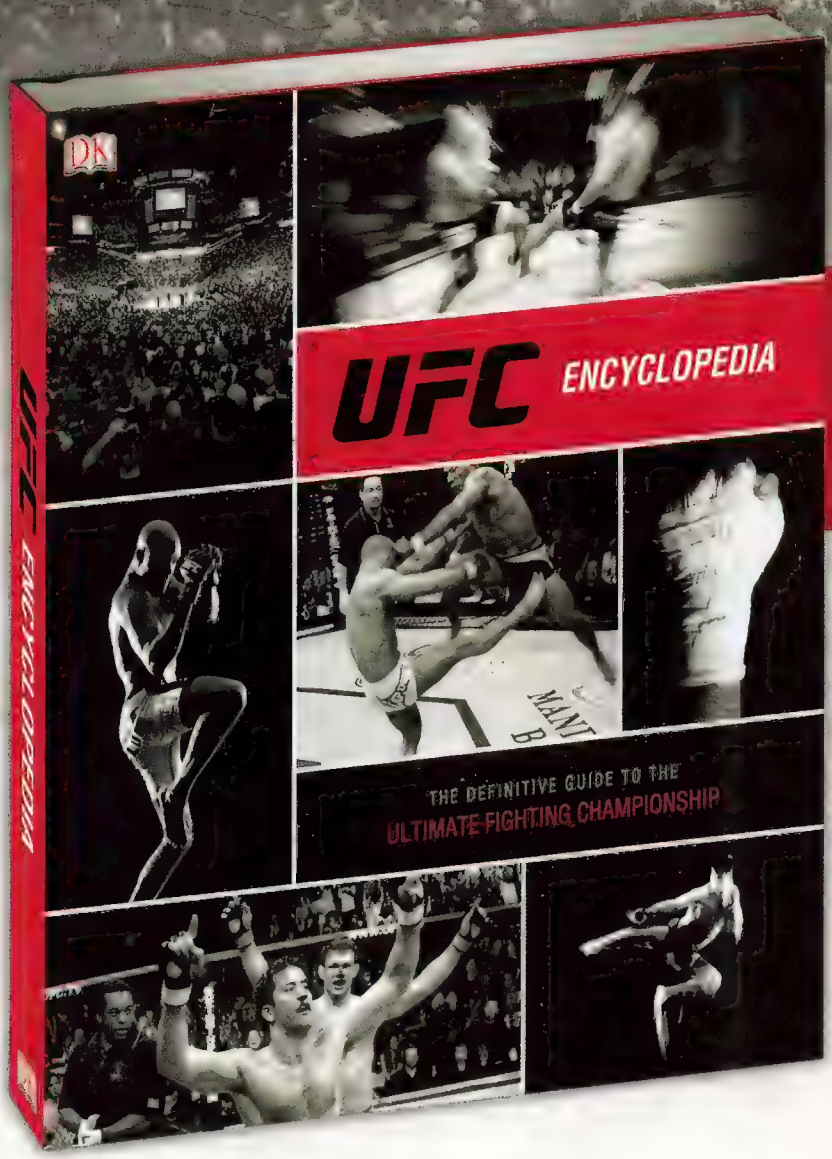

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GAMEPRO WINTER QUARTERLY 2011

JAZ RIGNALL

VP, CONTENT

AGE: 256 **ZODIAC:** Fish
FAVORITE FIGHTING GAME CHARACTER: Chun-Li
BEST GAME I'VE PLAYED THIS MONTH: *FIFA 12*
WORST JOB I'VE EVER HAD: Digging ditches
SECRET SKILL: Rwyn siarad cymraeg
GAME I'M MOST LOOKING FORWARD TO IN 2012: *Diablo III*

WILL HERRING

REVIEWS EDITOR

AGE: 24 **BEARD:** 5 stars **WAS RAISED BY:** Very polite wolves
FAVORITE FIGHTING GAME CHARACTER: Bang Shishigami
BEST GAME I'VE PLAYED THIS MONTH: *Ico & Shadow of the Colossus Collection*
SECRET SKILL: The best rapper on the GP staff/sharp silver tongue gon' cut you in half.
GAME I'M MOST LOOKING FORWARD TO IN 2012: *BioShock: Infinite*

JUSTIN HAYWALD

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

AGE: Beyond reckoning
ZODIAC: Aries
FAVORITE FIGHTING GAME CHARACTER: Kirby
BEST GAME I'VE PLAYED THIS MONTH: *Tiny Tower*
WORST JOB I'VE EVER HAD: Bailing hay
SECRET SKILL: Playing trumpet
GAME I'M MOST LOOKING FORWARD TO IN 2012: *Ni no Kuni*

PATRICK SHAW

SENIOR EDITOR

AGE: 27 **ZODIAC:** Gemini
FAVORITE FIGHTING GAME CHARACTER: Scorpion
BEST GAME I'VE PLAYED THIS MONTH: *Gears of War 3 (Beast Mode)*
WORST JOB I'VE EVER HAD: Security guard in a really s***ty neighborhood
SECRET SKILL: I have super hairy arms/chest and healing factor, like Wolverine.
GAME I'M MOST LOOKING FORWARD TO IN 2012: *BioShock: Infinite*

TOM PRICE

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

AGE: 38 **ZODIAC:** Sagittarius
FAVORITE FIGHTING GAME CHARACTER: Guile
BEST GAME I'VE PLAYED THIS MONTH: *Gears of War 3*
WORST JOB I'VE EVER HAD: Human Resources Assistant
SECRET SKILL: Can control the weather with his mind.
GAME I'M MOST LOOKING FORWARD TO IN 2012: *Mass Effect 3*

KAREN CHU

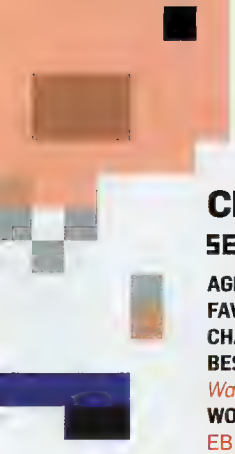
ART DIRECTOR

ZODIAC: Axolotl
FAVORITE FIGHTING GAME CHARACTER: Sub Zero
WORST JOB I'VE EVER HAD: Frog tits renderer

JASON WILSON

GROUP MANAGING EDITOR

AGE: 37 (knees, though, are 80) **ZODIAC:** It's Greek to me
FAVORITE FIGHTING GAME CHARACTER: Juggernaut
BEST GAME I'VE PLAYED THIS MONTH: *Kirby: Mass Attack*
WORST JOB I'VE EVER HAD: Community newspaper managing editor
SECRET SKILL: Fit six Ho Hos his mouth
GAME I'M MOST LOOKING FORWARD TO IN 2012: *Diablo III*



CHRIS HOLT
SENIOR ASSOCIATE EDITOR

AGE: 27 **ZODIAC:** Taurus
FAVORITE FIGHTING GAME CHARACTER: Kilik
BEST GAME I'VE PLAYED THIS MONTH: *Warhammer 40K: Space Marine*
WORST JOB I'VE EVER HAD: Clerk at EB Games. Tackled a 10-year-old for stealing an empty box.
SECRET SKILL: Pistols, basement, license to kill, no radar: I am unbeatable.
GAME I'M MOST LOOKING FORWARD TO IN 2012: *BioShock: Infinite*

KAT BAILEY PREVIEWS EDITOR

AGE: 28 **FAVORITE FIGHTING GAME CHARACTER:** Bridget
BEST GAME I'VE PLAYED THIS MONTH: *Dark Souls*
WORST JOB I'VE EVER HAD: Shlepping chicken at the local KFC
SECRET SKILL: Black belt in tae kwan do
GAME I'M MOST LOOKING FORWARD TO IN 2012: *Mass Effect 3*

OLIVIA HUBERT STAFF EDITOR

AGE: 23 **ZODIAC:** Scorpio
FAVORITE FIGHTING GAME CHARACTER: Gon
BEST GAME I'VE PLAYED THIS MONTH: *Castle Crashers*
WORST JOB I'VE EVER HAD: Phone-sales operator for a company that sells home security alarms
SECRET SKILL: Keeping secrets
GAME I'M MOST LOOKING FORWARD TO IN 2012: *The Last Guardian*

EMMANUEL MAIBERG
EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

AGE: 25 **ZODIAC:** Snorlax
FAVORITE FIGHTING GAME CHARACTER: Mitsurugi
BEST GAME I'VE PLAYED THIS MONTH: *Borderlands*
WORST JOB I'VE EVER HAD: Electrician's assistant (lasted one day)
SECRET SKILL: Crying on the inside
GAME I'M MOST LOOKING FORWARD TO IN 2012: *Far Cry 3*

PETE DAVISON CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

AGE: 30 **ZODIAC:** Taurus
FAVORITE FIGHTING GAME CHARACTER: Kasumi
BEST GAME I'VE PLAYED THIS MONTH: *Xenoblade Chronicles*
WORST JOB I'VE EVER HAD: Music teacher to 11-16-year-olds
SECRET SKILL: Once fixed a Sega Saturn controller using only a bottle of vodka, some Q-Tips, and a selection of paper towels.
GAME I'M MOST LOOKING FORWARD TO IN 2012: *Mass Effect 3*

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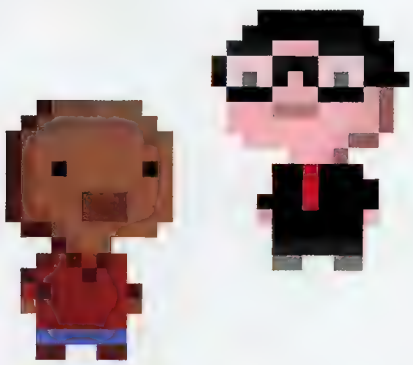

MCKINLEY NOBLE
STAFF EDITOR

AGE: Eternally 16
ZODIAC: Year of the Tiger
FAVORITE FIGHTING GAME CHARACTER: Chun-Li
BEST GAME I'VE PLAYED THIS MONTH: *Grand Prix Story*
WORST JOB I'VE EVER HAD: GameStop clerk
SECRET SKILL: Accelerated healing factor
GAME I'M MOST LOOKING FORWARD TO IN 2012: *Mass Effect 3*

CHRIS PARISI
VIDEO PRODUCER

AGE: 32
ZODIAC: Fire-breathing lion
FAVORITE FIGHTING GAME CHARACTER: Blanka (because he's supercheap)
BEST GAME I'VE PLAYED THIS MONTH: *NHL 12*
WORST JOB I'VE EVER HAD: Busboy at a fancy restaurant serving rich jerks
SECRET SKILL: Drawing cartoon genitals on people's faces in the newspaper
GAME I'M MOST LOOKING FORWARD TO IN 2012: *Aliens: Colonial Marines*

ANDREW YANG
SENIOR GRAPHIC DESIGNER

AGE: 654 in mushroom years
ZODIAC: Either Sagitarius or that snakey poser Ophiucus
FAVORITE FIGHTING GAME CHARACTER: Arakune
BEST GAME I'VE PLAYED THIS MONTH: *Adobe Photoshop*
WORST JOB I'VE EVER HAD: Senior graphic designer for a video-game magazine
SECRET SKILL: Modern dance
GAME I'M MOST LOOKING FORWARD TO IN 2012: *The Secret World*

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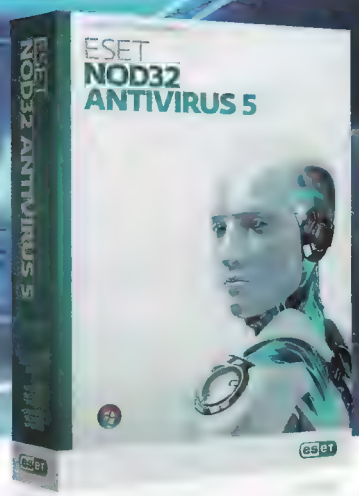

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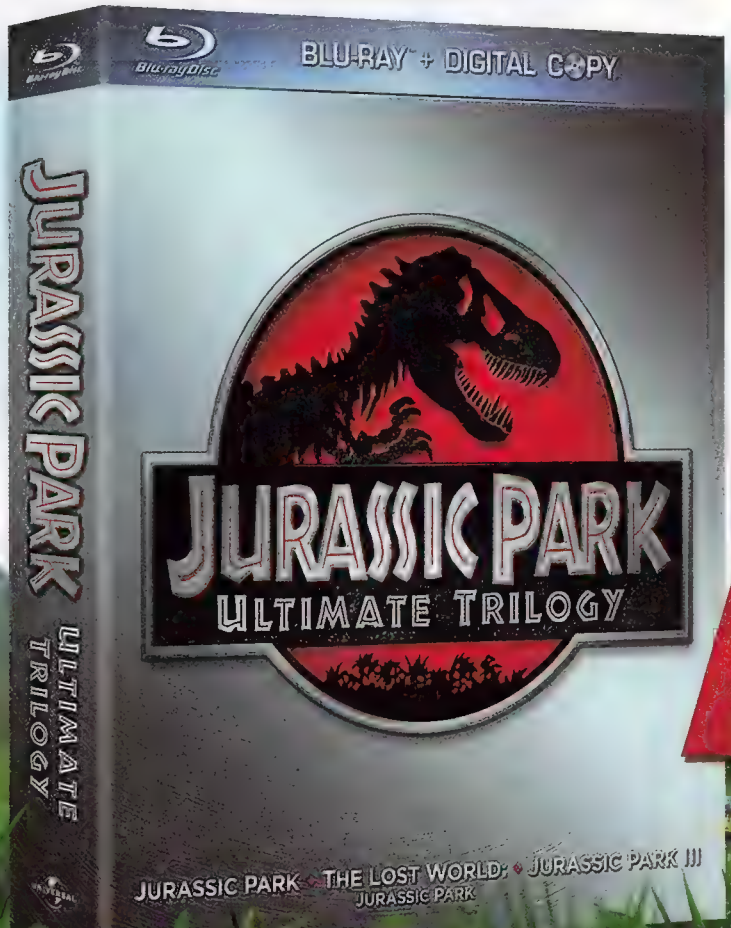

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Spawn

ANGRY BIRDS devs talk about the future // ***THREE RINGS*** shows us the inside of their awesome office // ***EZIO*** gets things done with his hook-blade // The Gunzerker rules ***BORDERLANDS 2*** // There are games out there that we can't believe exist // ***STRANGEST VIDEO-GAME BANS*** from around the world // ***GUESS THE CHESTS*** // We ♥ sentry bots.

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ANGRY BIRDS FEVER

FIVE WAYS *ANGRY BIRDS* WENT FROM A FLEDGLING FRANCHISE TO WINNING OVER THE WORLD—AND WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS FOR THE BIRDS.

If you own a smart phone (or have Google Chrome installed on your computer), chances are you've contracted *Angry Birds* fever at some point. Rovio's simple but absurdly addicting *Angry Birds* has become not just a massive gaming franchise but a bona fide cultural phenomenon. The *Angry Birds* team shares their secret ingredients to their continuing success.

IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED...

Rovio developed over 50 games with minimal success before launching *Angry Birds* upon the world.

1 CHARMING BOTH HARDCORE AND CASUAL PLAYERS

Angry Birds is an "easy" game, but it's certainly not mindless entertainment (especially when you unlock more advanced levels). Rovio explains that "*Angry Birds* is intuitive to use but difficult to master, which makes it easy for novice gamers to pick up. But it keeps experienced gamers interested as well."

2 UPDATES, UPDATES, UPDATES

Since its initial release in 2009, *Angry Birds* has received continuous updates, which is a huge part of how the game has remained on top of the sales charts. "[This] keeps our fans engaged as there are new levels with new themes to check out."

3 THE BIRD IS THE WORD

Angry Birds' characters are appearing not just on iPhone, iPad, and computer screens but also T-shirts, phone cases, lunch boxes, and even neckties. While numerous games feature similar "launch and smash" gameplay, few feature characters as charismatic as Rovio's fuming feathered friends. "Maybe it's their bright, bold designs or the pathos and humor of their eternal battle with the pigs. But for whatever reason, people just love them."

4 THINK OUTSIDE THE ~~BOX~~ IPHONE

Not to be confused with Pixar's and Rovio's collaboration on the film *Rio*, the upcoming *Angry Birds* movie is a prime example of how the team is intent on expanding well beyond just games. They've even entered into the realm of culinary creations. "We recently purchased the Finnish animation studio, Kombo. In publishing, we are just about to release an *Angry Birds* cookbook."

5 NEVER LEAVE THE NEST

No one loves the game's grumpy cast of critters more than the *Angry Birds* team. And each of them has their own favorite angry bird, too. "Black Bomber bird. It's the most effective one," says Angry Birds Media Coordinator Oona Hilkamo. VP of Franchise Development Ville Heijari disagrees, preferring the "Boomerang bird, because it's the best." Saara Bergstrom, the manager of social marketing and consumer engagement for the franchise, favors the "Yellow bird, because it's so fast."

DID YOU KNOW?

A less family-friendly parody of *Angry Birds* was released on the App Store called *Angry Turds*. The scatological satire features chimps who hurl their excrement at evil explorers.

ANGRY BIRDS RELEASES

ANGRY BIRDS
Has been downloaded 42 million times since it was first released in 2009.

ANGRY BIRDS SEASONS
Includes Halloween, St. Patrick's Day, and other holiday-themed levels.

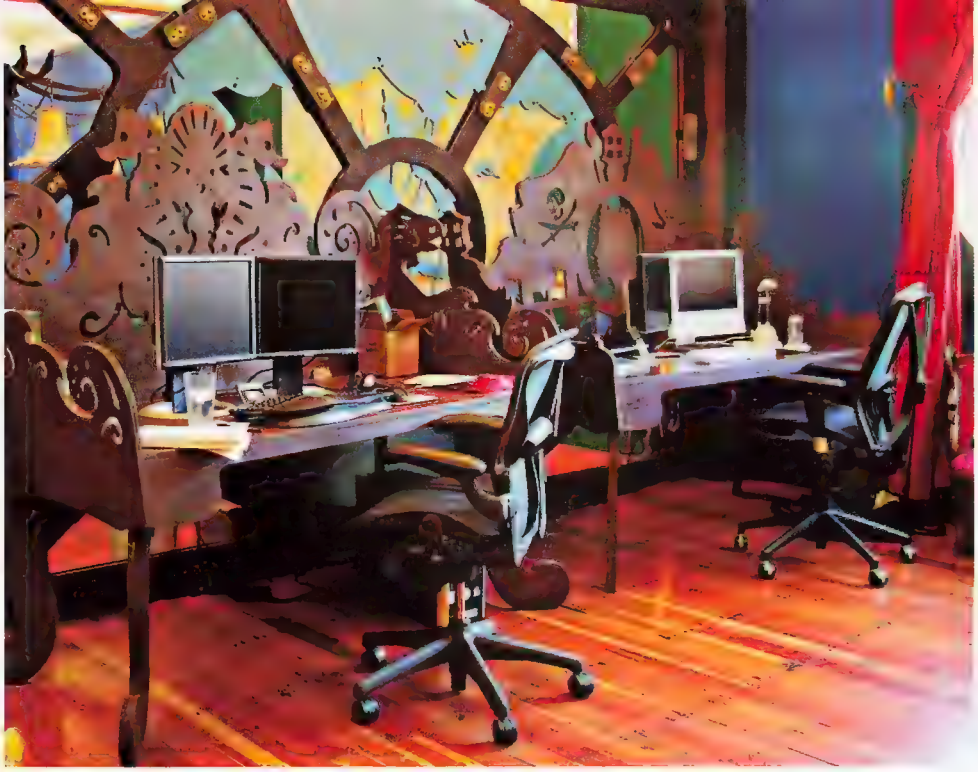
ANGRY BIRDS RIO
Features characters from the animated film *Rio*.

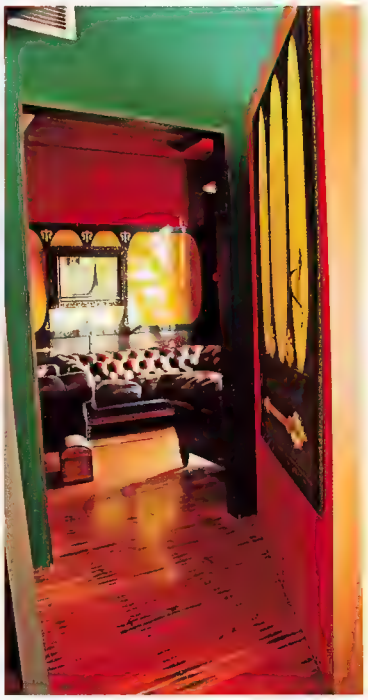
ANGRY BIRDS ON GOOGLE CHROME
Allows you to play *Angry Birds* on your browser.

ANGRY BIRDS MAGIC
Comes preinstalled with all Nokia NFC Symbian devices, encouraging you to link up with other players to unlock levels.

ANGRY BIRDS COOKBOOK
Rovio creates an *Angry Birds*–themed cookbook featuring various egg recipes.

ANGRY BIRDS 2
Rumors suggest that the sequel to *Angry Birds* will allow us to experience things from the pig's point of view. Will pigs fly? Will the Birds' rage ever be quelled? Time will tell....





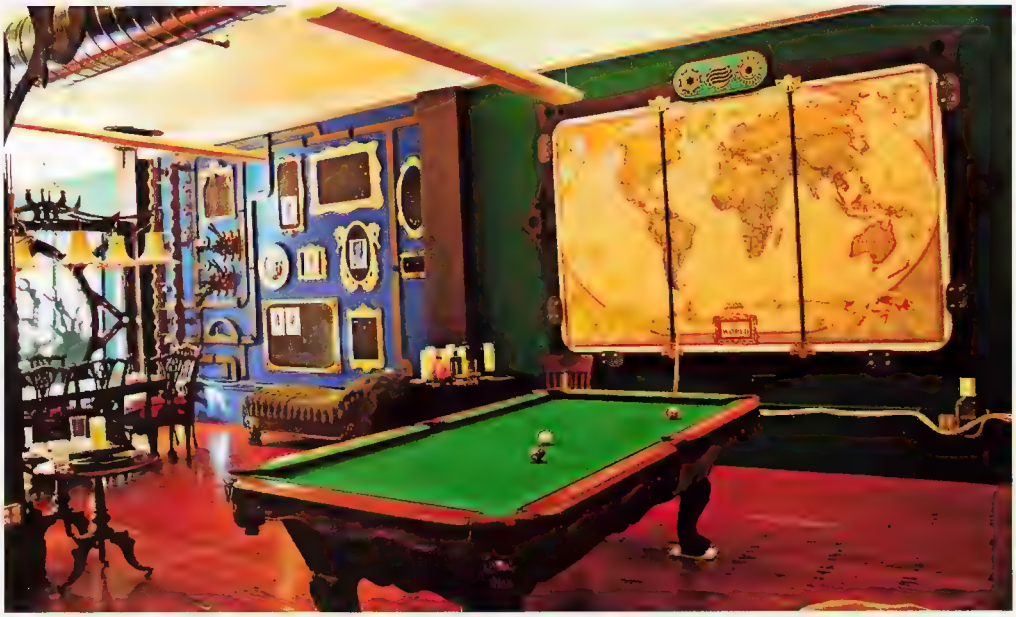
AWESOME VIDEO-GAME PLACES

THREE RINGS

▶ **LOCATION:**
San Francisco

▶ **GAMES THEY'VE MADE:**
Spiral Knights, Puzzle Pirates

Indie developer Three Rings hired the interior designers over at Because We Can to transform their office into the *Nautilus*...as in the submarine from Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*. The surreal office space includes ceiling escape hatches, a fully stocked steampunk bar, a giant purple plushy sea creature, and even a secret room that people can access behind a bookshelf.



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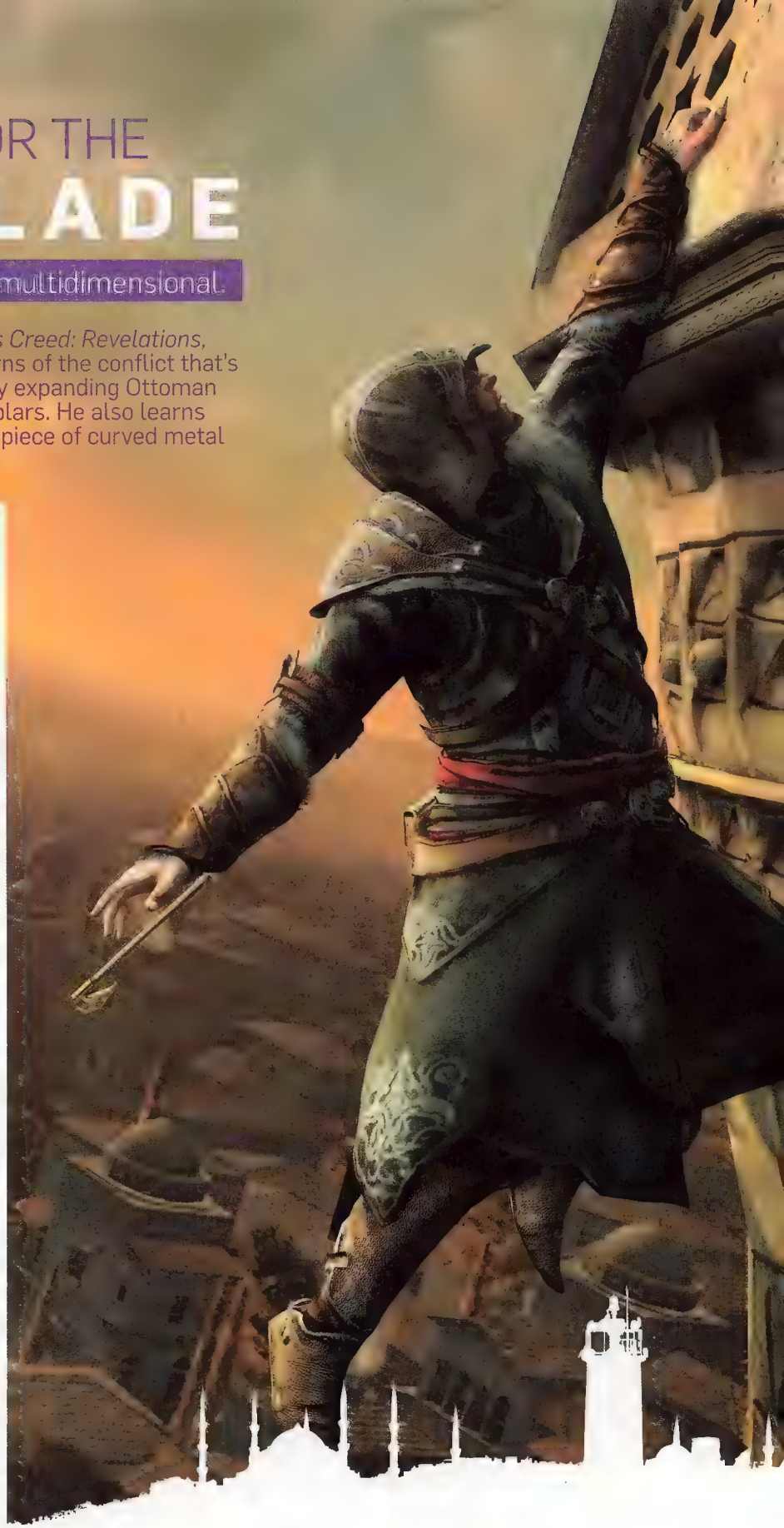
5 COOL USES FOR THE HOOKBLADE

New *Assassin's Creed* tool is multidimensional.

In the earliest moments of *Assassin's Creed: Revelations*, Ezio docks at Constantinople and learns of the conflict that's quietly simmering between the rapidly expanding Ottoman Empire and the remnants of the Templars. He also learns about the "hookblade," a wicked little piece of curved metal that has multiple uses.



1 RAPID CLIMBING
An assassin's trade—and survival—depends on fleetness. That goes for both the horizontal and vertical plane. Though Ezio is no slouch at when it comes to climbing walls, the hookblade lets him shinny up structures at a speed that would shame a monkey.

2 QUICK TRAVEL
Ezio's hookblade grants him pocket-sized transportation. He can use the tool to whip down ropes and wires at lightning speed. This stops his pursuers cold in their tracks, as neither the Ottomans nor the Tempalrs have gotten the hang of the zipline thing just yet.

3 SOMERSAULTING OVER AND AROUND ENEMIES
When Ezio is on the run and a cloud of enemies suddenly cuts him off at the pass, he can use the hookblade to swing over or around his attackers with barely a hitch in his momentum.

4 KILLING WITH STYLE
Because, let's face it, this sharp piece of metal was forged with the intent of sinking its wicked point into the soft guts of a Templar soldier.

5 DISEMBOWELING MINSTRELS
OK, so you can't actually cut out the lower intestines of the most reviled citizens in *Assassin's Creed*. But there does come a time when it is necessary for Ezio to punch some minstrels in the face, and that's almost as gratifying.

CREATOR OF *SONIC* HAS GONE FISHIN'

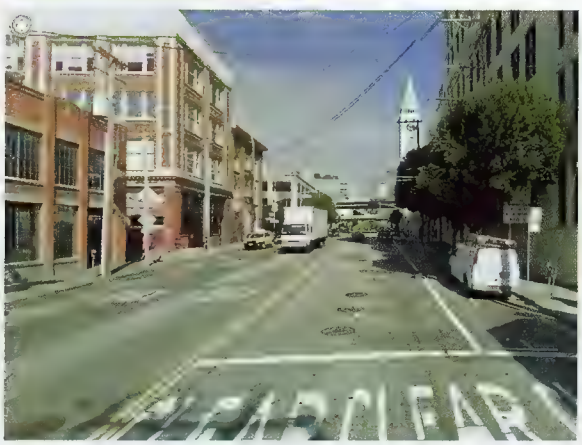
XSEED's new angling simulator has an impressive, if somewhat unexpected, pedigree. It was developed by the same guy who invented one of the most recognizable video-game characters of all time, *Sonic the Hedgehog*. While Sonic won't be making an appearance in Yuki Naga's new *Fishing Resort*, there's still a host of cute (human) characters fishing for exotic fish in equally exotic locales, with realism courtesy of the Wii's motion controls. Fishing-related minigames also abound, as Naga seems to have traded in his rings for hooks. You can drown some virtual worms, too, this winter when *Fishing Resort* releases for the Wii.

Han Solo in CARBONITE ICE CUBES

Just when you think they've thought of every possible nerd mashup (Zombie Harry Potter in a TARDIS!), ThinkGeek continues to blow our minds with awesome ideas. These Han Solo in carbonite ice cube trays should have been on store shelves as soon as *The Empire Strikes Back* premiered. But genius, apparently, takes time.

DUDE, WHERE'S MY OFFICE?

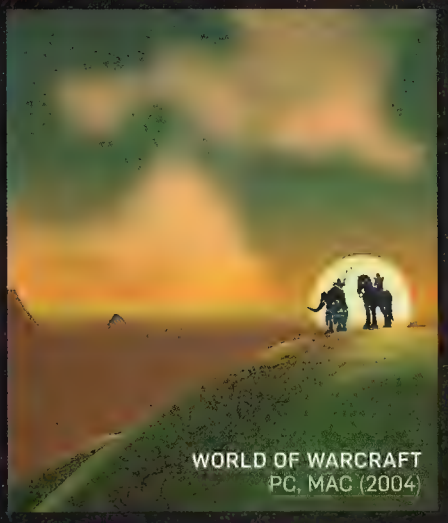
REAL-LIFE PLACES IN GAMES
DRIVER: SAN FRANCISCO



CREDIT: GOOGLE MAPS

Driver: San Francisco features a detailed re-creation of the famous City by the Bay that includes many of its well-known landmarks. But as residents of San Francisco ourselves, we couldn't help but notice a few strange things about *Driver*'s representation of San Francisco—including a jumbo-sized version of S.F.'s iconic, winding Lombard Street, and as illustrated above, the complete absence of *GamePro*'s office building (they replaced us with a freeway onramp!). Other incongruities include San Francisco's City Hall sitting on the wrong side of town and streets that look like they got Kramer's extra-wide "luxury" expansion.

FAR CRY 2
PS3, X360, PC (2008)



WORLD OF WARCRAFT
PC, MAC (2004)

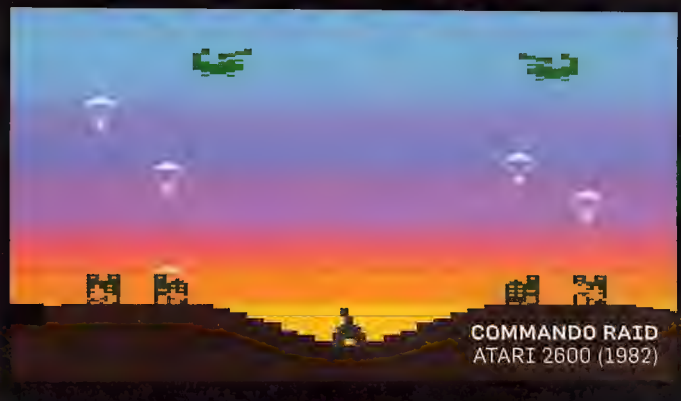
SIMULATED SUN SETS

Beauty within video-game worlds is frequently discussed and admired. But what about that gaseous zone above us inhabited by clouds and light?

L.A. NOIRE
PS3, X360, PC (2011)

RAGE
PS3, X360, PC (2011)

F.E.A.R. 3
PS3, X360, PC (2011)



COMMANDO RAID
ATARI 2600 (1982)

CRAFTING A GUNZERKER

GEARBOX SHOWS US HOW IT'S DONE IN *BORDERLANDS 2*.

Words by Billy Berghammer

The original *Borderlands* moved away from a traditional photo-realistic look into an überstylized comic book-ish wasteland of gun porn. But the story and its characters don't have too much depth. Gearbox Software is going back to the figurative drawing board with the upcoming sequel, and their debut character is a dual-wielding badass. We picked the brain of Gearbox Concept Artist **SCOTT KESTER** to find out how he crafted the new Berzerker—the Gunzerker.

THE STARTING LINE

"A lot of times you're given a very vague, simple thing. It's up to you to take those ideas that are just words and create visuals out of them. It's very freeing, and it's really fun to do that."

BEGIN SIMPLY

"When I start to concept...I always start traditionally. I have sketchbooks and sketchbooks of this stuff and just use pencils and pens. I usually do my revs and my roughs all traditionally. I just like the feel of paper. I like the control that I still have with a pen in my actual hand on paper."

DRAW IT AGAIN

"That usually takes 30 to 40 drawings, maybe not that many. Maybe you hit it in 10 drawings; maybe it's the first few, and everyone is really happy with it. It's taking that idea and creating an image. But then it's alright, [and] I need to turn it around—what's the back of it look like? What's the side, what's all of his gear look like?"

CO-OP

"We really converse back and forth to see what fits. Typically, it's the game designer themselves [that] are the one that puts the major stakes in, just like we as the art team are the ones that put the major components of art together. But we definitely cross-pollinate. A lot of times, that's when the really good things happen."

HEADPHONES ON

"When I'm working on a certain character, I listen to everything. I love hip-hop, hardcore and electronic music, and just regular rock 'n' roll. When I was working on Salvador, I was listening to a lot of old punk rock, some old Dead Kennedys stuff, or even some post punk kind of things.... Music is my biggest driving force whenever I'm working."

INKED

"I just love ink. I love just that. That concept of that. I love things that are hand-drawn. I myself am not a huge fan of photo-realism, so it has been a great opportunity to take those interests of mine and try to create a stylized reality, because that seems a lot more interesting to me.

BORDERLIMITS

"As rigs get more complicated, or something has multiple arms, the bone counts go up—it's really just technology. And I don't even blame that. To me, that just gives us a room to work in and this is the ceiling. Really, creativity is about how well you can use the tools you have at your disposal. "

NOW, WITH COLOR

"It's nice to open up the palette a little bit more and also have the time to develop the palette a lot richer and do what we did in the last game better...but also just take us to these new areas. It's been very freeing for the entire team—from the level design to the artists making models, and myself. It's been a lot of fun."

WHO IS *SALVADOR?*

"He's just a thick, squat dude that's just ready to take on whatever is thrown at him. It's kind of funny, because I always view him as a guy who doesn't even realize that he's short. He has no concept of that."
–Scott Kester

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WHAT THE WHAT

GAMES WE CAN'T BELIEVE EXIST

We mean, really, who plays this stuff?

Plenty of weird games are out there, though sometimes weird is good. Exhibit A: *Katamari Damacy*. But some games are weird because we can't quite figure out who exactly would want to play them—and why. Here's a couple of odd titles we've taken notice of that stretch the bounds of what may make a game fun but somehow compel us to actually try them out.

STREET CLEANING SIMULATOR

(PC, $39)

Judging from the videos available online, *Street Cleaning Simulator* appears to be every bit as insanely mind-numbing as you might expect. Developed by Excalibur Publishing, the creators of other PC titles like *Bus & Cable Car Simulator* and *Gardening Simulator*, this realistic sim allows you to discover what the life of a street cleaner is really like. The odd thing is that nothing out of the ordinary happens once you embark on your street-cleaning adventures. No hooligans jump out of the bushes in an attempt to spray graffiti on your truck. No one tries to plant an explosive on your vehicle or to steal your truck. It's just straight-up realism, as if the guys who make *Madden* suddenly decided it was worth it to create a realistic video-game representation of scrubbing the soot and bum barf off city streets. But the strangest thing about *Street Cleaning Simulator* is that it features highly detailed environments and cleaning trucks, which make it clear that a lot of time and energy has been put into making this game...which can't appeal to many people. Can it? No, really, I want to know. *—Patrick Shaw*

PRIME MINISTER'S QUESTIONS: THE GAME

(PC, FREE)

The way they conduct legislative politics in merry ole England is quite different than how we do things in the U.S. of A. Over there, the parliamentary debates are lively, hilarious, and televised. Here, they're just televised (or so I hear; who the hell watches C-Span?). The Prime Minister (the leader of "The Government," aka whichever party has the majority at the moment) fields questions from the leader of The Opposition (aka the other party) while the assembly cheers and jeers everything being said. The game is, at it's core, a fighting game, but with verbal kick and punches instead of real fist-flying combos. It's a quirky concept, presented in a charming 8-bit style, but unfortunately nowhere near as fun and entertaining as the real thing. Maybe it needs a multiplayer heckling option? *—Tom Price*

ANTIQUES ROADSHOW: DISCOVERING AMERICA'S HIDDEN TREASURES

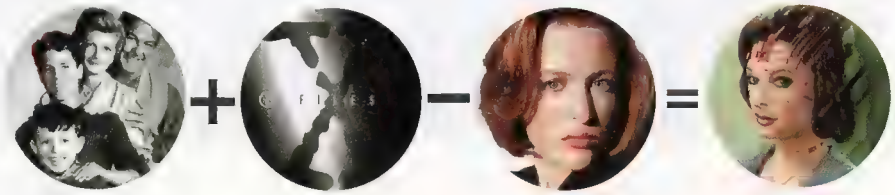
(iPAD, $4.99)

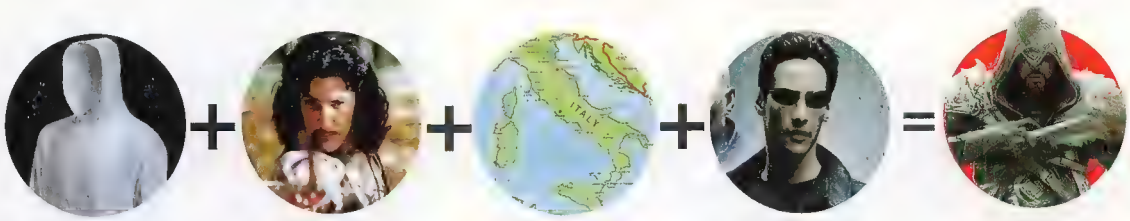
As a history nerd, *Antiques Roadshow* is one of my favorite TV shows to watch in marathon form on rainy Saturdays. The pleasure of seeing some little old lady find out that the candy dish she bought at a garage sale for a nickel actually belonged to Marie Antoinette and is now worth millions is only outstripped by the glee of seeing some pompous windbag find out their signed Babe Ruth ball is a forgery. But I never imagined they could somehow make a game of it. Strangely, the gameplay is something more like *American Pickers* (another show I have a soft spot for), where you must discover lost treasures in people's junk piles, restore them, and then take them on *Antiques Roadshow* for appraisal. Something, something, profit. I don't know—I would have preferred to play as an appraiser who gets to tell smug jerks their crap is worthless; maybe they'll include that in an update. *—Tom Price*

VIDEO-GAME RECIPES

EVER WONDER HOW THE BRILLIANT IDEAS BEHIND YOUR FAVORITE VIDEO-GAME FRANCHISES ARE BORN?

So have we! That's why we've put together this chart depicting how the premises of these landmark games could have (possibly) been conceived of. This is probably not how most game ideas come together, but who knows—there could be a whiteboard at a game studio somewhere that looks exactly like....





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THE BAN HAMMER

4 OF THE STRANGEST VIDEO-GAME BANS FROM AROUND THE WORLD.

U.S.A.—*MEDAL OF HONOR*
The 2010 reboot moved the action to the modern-day conflict in Afghanistan and let you play from the other side as the Taliban. The U.S. military did not like this and banned it from being sold on bases, even after EA scrubbed the reference from the game.

SAUDI ARABIA—*POKÉMON*
According to Saudi officials, they banned *Pokémon* for "promoting Zionism and gambling." While we honestly have no idea where Jigglypuff stands on the issue of Jewish settlements and Palestinian statehood—and realize that the ban only applied to the trading cards—we still love the idea that Pokémon might be some kind of Zionist conspiracy.

AUSTRALIA—*GRAND THEFT AUTO*
GTA III, *IV*, and *Vice City* were all banned because of the inclusion of prostitutes in the game. Kind of a strange stance for a country where the world's oldest profession is technically legal. I guess running innocents down with your car (which we're pretty sure isn't legal there) isn't as frowned upon.

DENMARK—*EA SPORTS MMA*
It wasn't the violence that got the Danes' panties in a twist. Rather, it was the promotion and marketing of energy drinks in the game, something that's apparently illegal in Denmark. Way to go after the real villains of society, Danes.

A BLING TO THE PAST

Celebrating the 25th anniversary of everyone's favorite effeminate elf, First 4 Figures has created an extremely limited supply of bronze (painted) statues of Link atop his horse, Epona. Standing at 17 inches tall, this ultimate *Zelda* collectible can be yours for just half a grand.

Be sure to also check out our zesty Zelda *feature on page* ***76****.*

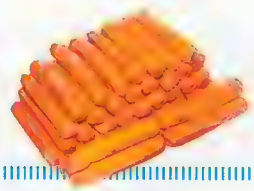
FOR THOSE OF US WHO JUST CAN'T GET ENOUGH OF

DOUBLE FINE

PSYCHONAUTS VAULT VIEWER

It may not be a game, exactly, but one of the most delightful new game-related apps comes from the fertile minds at Double Fine, and it reminds us even more why we still unconditionally love a game that came out way back in 2005. *Psychonauts* Vault Viewer lets you view all the memory vaults of the game's characters. So what, you say? I can just start up the game and look at them again for the 400th time. But can you listen to exclusive commentary from Double Fine's Scott Campbell and Tim Schafer? Now you can. The Vault Viewer is available for iOS devices and is free.

HOT NEW CONTROLS FOR *YOUR SAUSAGE HANDS*



T.A.C. 3 GAMING MOUSE FOR PS3

While it's possible to play first-person shooters perfectly well using a joypad, some players feel a mouse and keyboard adds an extra degree of finesse to their skills. If you're one of those, you'll likely be very interested in HORI's TAC 3, a PS3 mouse and cut-down keyboard combo that has all the buttons you need—including six programmable ones—for your FPS murder-death-kill sprees.

I gave it a good road test and was highly impressed. The mouse is nicely weighted and hefty, the keyboard feels solid, and it's easy to set up. Will it give you an edge? Depends on how good you are with a joypad. I've always favored a mouse for precision FPS play, so the TAC 3 worked really well for me. My shots were pinpoint, rather than in the area as they often are when I play with a joypad, which is the difference between a kill and getting killed—and the reason why I'll definitely be using this controller for all my future online multiplayer battles.

—Jaz Rignall

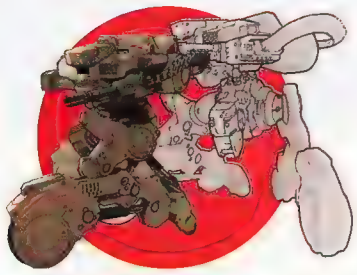
THE YEAR *of the* SENTRY BOT

SENTRY BOTS ARE NOTHING NEW IN SHOOTERS, BUT THIS YEAR, THERE'S BEEN A FEW REALLY NOTABLE ONES, INCLUDING ONE OF OUR FAVORITES OF ALL TIME.

SENTRY BOT (RAGE)

// DISPOSITION: **FRIENDLY, UNLESS ONE OF YOUR ENEMIES BUILT IT** //
// PERSONALITY: **MAN'S BEST FRIEND** //

The sentry bots in *Rage*, which you craft from spare parts found around the wasteland, are easily the most active and aggressive killbot buddies we've seen in awhile. Not only do they follow you over difficult terrain and shoot oncoming enemies with their mounted minigun, but they also chase down baddies and pounce on them no matter how big or bad or armored the target is. Launching two at the same time is like having your own little pack of metal guard dogs. Really smart metal guard dogs.



AUTOMATED SECURITY BOT (DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION)

// DISPOSITION: **UNFRIENDLY, UNTIL HACKED** //
// PERSONALITY: **NOT A LOT** //

The security bots encountered by Adam Jensen are usually best avoided, at least until you've acquired the augment that allows you to hack into them. Once you're able to do that, you can turn the bots off, or better yet, turn them against their masters, clearing the way for you as you infiltrate whatever facility you're busting into. Design-wise, they're a bit drab, looking like R2-D2's distant, less cute cousin.

SENTRY TURRET (PORTAL 2)

// DISPOSITION: **UNFRIENDLY** //
// PERSONALITY: **CHEEKY** //

Easily the cutest of all sentient weapons platforms, the sentry turret from *Portal* has taken on the same kind of external cultural life as all the other tropes from the game like Companion Cubes, GlaDOS and that potentially fictional cake. In *Portal 2* we saw a few new versions of the sleek, mass-produced cuties, including a weird two-headed Frankenstein model and the tubby prima donna version.

CHESTY MATCHUP FUN TIME

Can you match the following video-game characters just by looking at their torsos? If you already did it before finishing this sentence, you should be ashamed of yourself. These characters are more than just shapely bodies for you to *leer* at.

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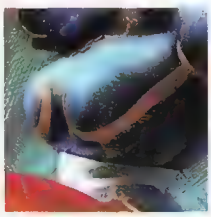
2. 
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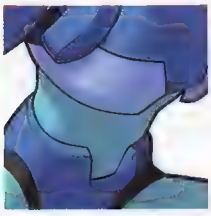
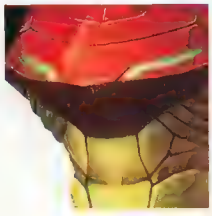
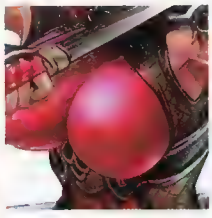
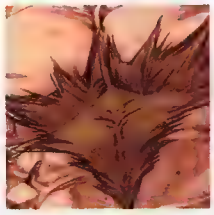
6. 
7. 
8. 
9. 
10.

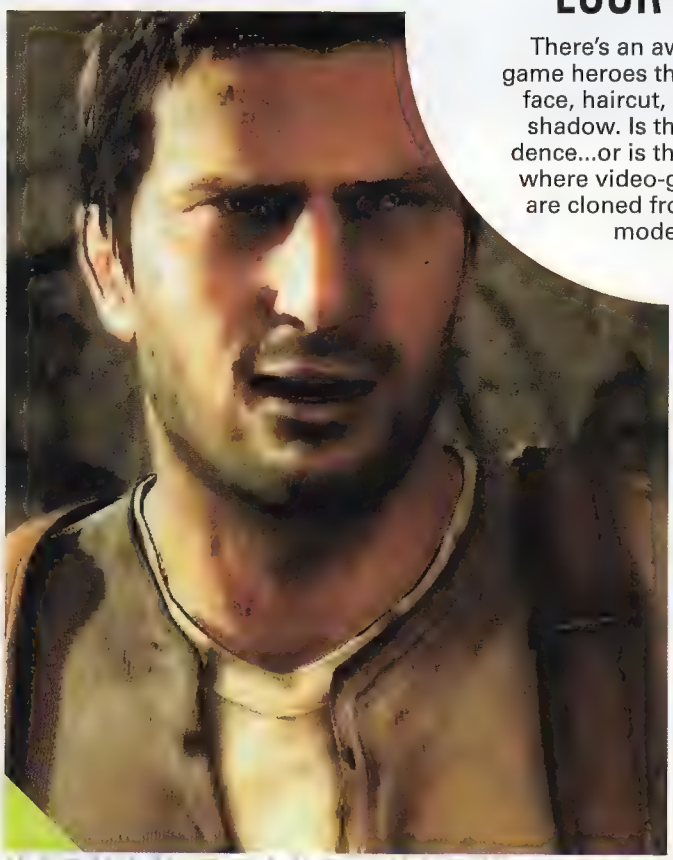
ANSWERS: 1 = MASTER CHIEF; 2 = CHUN-LI; 3 = COMMANDER SHEPARD; 4 = KRATOS; 5 = MA-RIO; 6 = MEGA MAN X; 7 = SAMUS ARAN; 8 = TAKI; 9 = ZANGIEF; 10 = PRINCESS ZELDA

SAM FISHER (SPLINTER CELL)

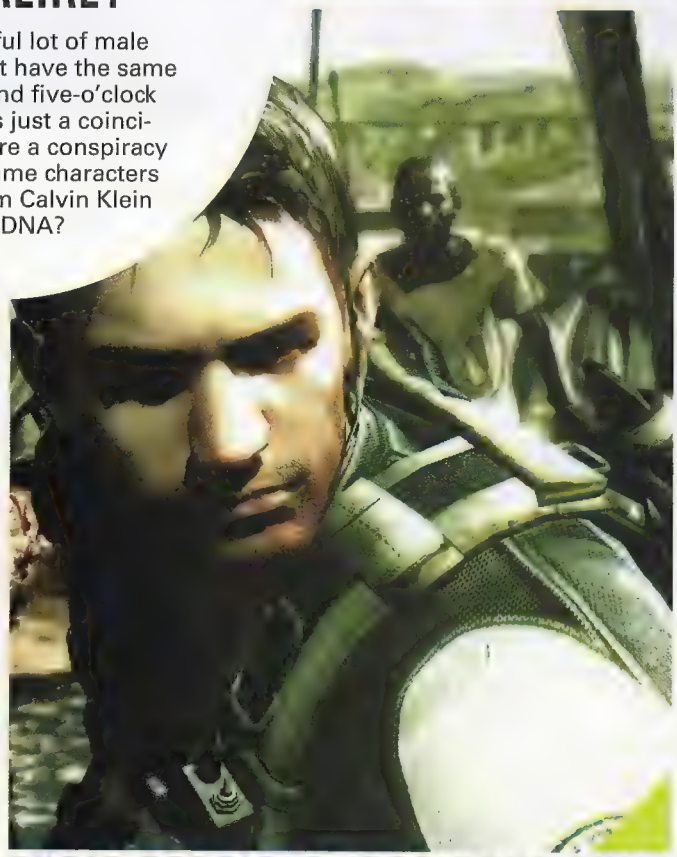
JOHN TANNER (DIVIDE)

WHY DO WE ALL LOOK ALIKE?

There's an awful lot of male game heroes that have the same face, haircut, and five-o'clock shadow. Is this just a coincidence...or is there a conspiracy where video-game characters are cloned from Calvin Klein model DNA?

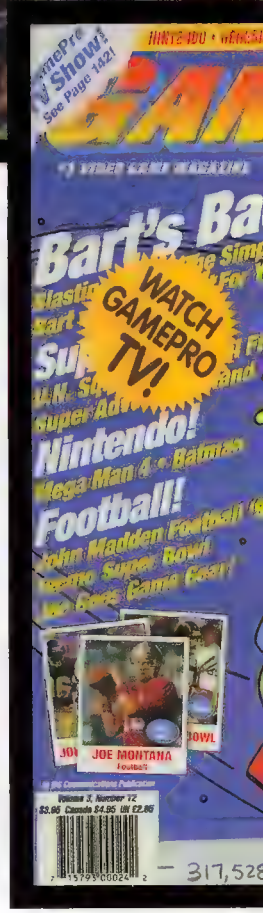


NATHAN DRAKE (UNCHARTED)



CHRIS REDFIELD (RESIDENT EVIL)

GREAT MOMENTS IN... *GAMEPRO* HISTORY

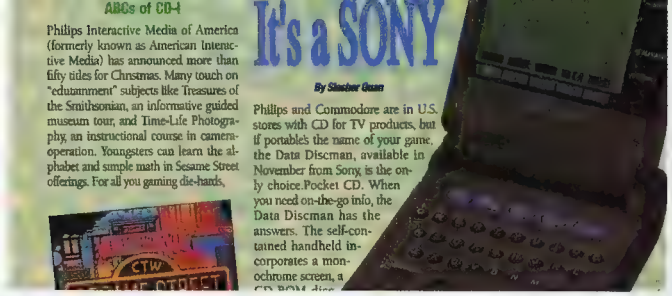


10 YEARS AGO

THEY GROW UP SO FAST.
The fun thing about looking into gaming's past is seeing things you forgot. Like the fact that *Ico* came out at around the same time as *Halo*. A rather tepid preview of *Halo* in this issue suggests that we had no idea about its hit potential, while an incredibly awesome ad for *Ico* (yes, ads can look awesome sometimes) really stands out in the early part of the book. It's weird to think that *Ico*—which has enthralled us again thanks to the HD remake—has been around that long.

HALO RISING
We apparently came around to *Halo*, because it got a near top score from our reviewer, only getting dinged a half notch for the controls (someone didn't like the Warthog driving, apparently). That's even better than the score for *Metal Gear Solid 2*, which also ran in this issue. Seeing those massive games come out at the same time (alongside some other future classics like *Burnout*, *Dead or Alive 3*, and *Silent Hill 2*) is a reminder of what a great time that was for games.

GTA III—THIS THING MAY BE BIG, HUH?
Whether or not the *GamePro* editorial team of 2001 felt a game's relative importance dictated how much page space its review got is lost to the mists of time. But *GTA III* only getting a half-page review (albeit, the exact same near top score as *Halo*) while *Parappa the Rapper 2* and *Jak and Daxter* get full pages to themselves? That's criminal. But we weren't the only ones who didn't see the *GTA* juggernaut looming on the horizon.

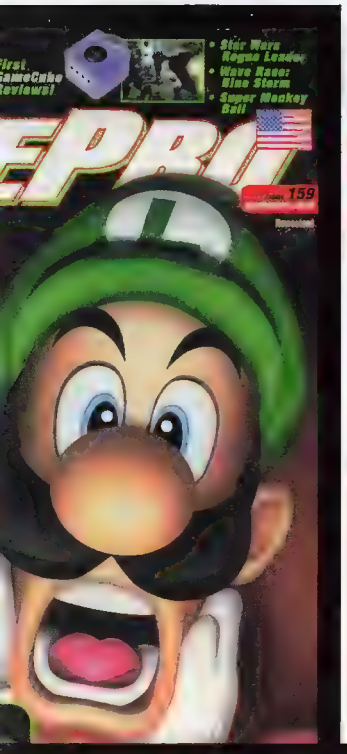

ABCs of CD-I

Philips Interactive Media of America (formerly known as American Interactive Media) has announced more than fifty titles for Christmas. Many touch on "edutainment" subjects like Treasures of the Smithsonian, an informative guided museum tour, and Time-Life Photography, an instructional course in camera operation. Youngsters can learn the alphabet and simple math in Sesame Street offerings. For all you gaming die-hards,

It's a SONY

By Sinister Geen

Philips and Commodore are in U.S. stores with CD for TV products, but if portables the name of your game, the Data Discman, available in November from Sony, is the only choice.Pocket CD. When you need on-the-go info, the Data Discman has the answers. The self-contained handheld incorporates a monochrome screen, a



20 YEARS AGO

I THINK WE FOUND THE KINDLE'S GRANDADDY

The games industry was going CD crazy back in '92, and our coverage of developments included not only what Sega and Nintendo were planning (neither worked out so great) and the behemoth—in both size and price—Philips CD-I but also a strange little device from Sony called the Data Discman, marketed as an early e-book device. The crappy monochrome display and inability to play music CDs didn't exactly help justify the $500-plus price.

THEY DIDN'T EVEN HAVE DEMOS BACK THEN?

Christopher Bires from Medford, Oregon, wrote in to suggest that game companies produce a "sample cart" that would "showcase the first section of a level on an up-coming title." Mr. Bires believed that these sample carts could "help convince a potentially undecided customer to purchase the game". Dude, wait till you can just download them for free in a few years from then.

AND PEOPLE HADN'T EVEN HEARD OF TIGER WOODS YET

Not only did early issues of *GamePro* have entire sections dedicated to sports games (remember when there was more than one NFL game on the market? We, neither), but they even had the cojones to run a five-page feature just on golf games. Looking back, though, that really was a golden era for digital duffers.

GAMEPRO
#1 VIDEO GAME MAGAZINE
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Rip Into Action On Your NES!
NEO GEO!
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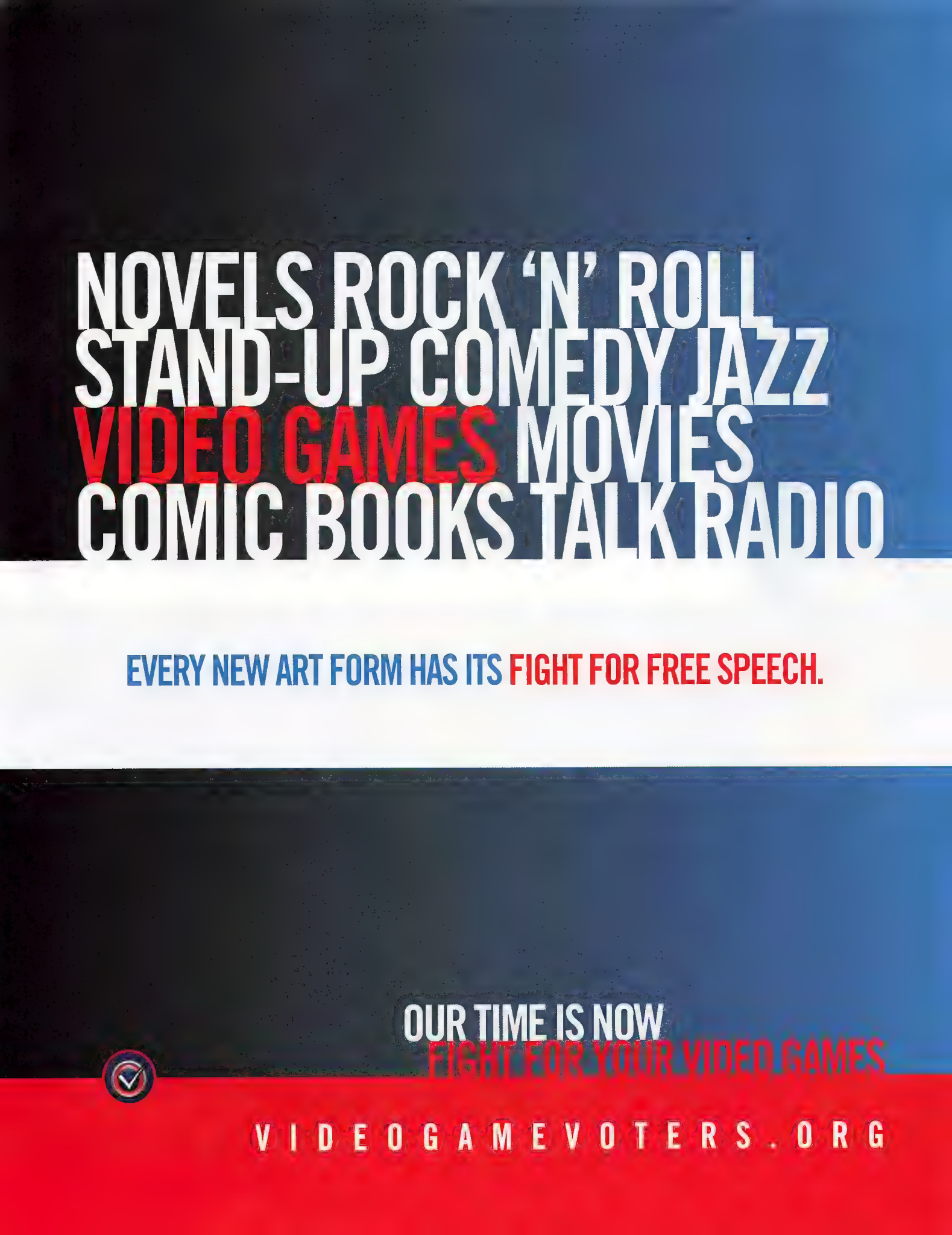
See Page 130


NOVELS ROCK 'N' ROLL
STAND-UP COMEDY JAZZ
VIDEO GAMES MOVIES
COMIC BOOKS TALK RADIO
EVERY NEW ART FORM HAS ITS FIGHT FOR FREE SPEECH.
OUR TIME IS NOW
FIGHT FOR YOUR VIDEO GAMES
VIDEOGAMEVOTERS.ORG

TOM'S T-SHIRTS

TOM PRICE highlights some of his rarest torso-protectors.

Working in the video-game industry as long as I have, I've collected a ton of game-related detritus. I've got enough weird lighters, vinyl figurines, and strangely branded foodstuffs to last me a lifetime. But the one thing I do love to get is T-shirts. Some I wear, and some sit in a bag in the back of my closet, hoping for the day many years from now I can take them on *Pawn Stars* and sell them for half what they're worth (that's the closest thing to a pension plan I'll ever get). Here are some of my favorites:

1. GRIM FANDANGO:
Easily my oldest shirt that's still in the current rotation. I try to not wear it too often, though—only when I want to show the kids around the office how cool and obscure I used to be.

2. JAPANESE HALO 3:
The kanji supposedly reads "Save Cortana," but for all I know, it says, "Look at this fat *gaijin* nerd." Given away by Bungie at TGS in 2007, they are supposedly very limited editions.

3. JAPANESE GTA III:
I know that this one translates correctly because the ticket agent at Narita airport in Japan told me what it said, rather bemusedly. Good thing that didn't happen in an airport here, otherwise I probably would have had my first body-cavity search.

4. OLD MAN MURRAY:
I think Erik Wolpaw sent me this himself after he wrote a review for me for some undoubtedly long-dead magazine. This is the one I bust out when the *Grim Fandango* shirt doesn't blow people's minds sufficiently.

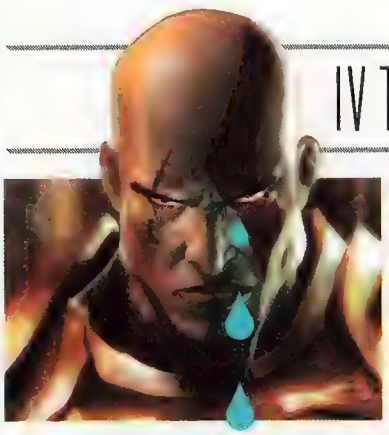
PLANTS VS. ZOMBIES
MUSIC CAMEOS WE'D LIKE TO SEE

Ever since the original Dancing Zombie moonwalked its way out of *Plants vs. Zombies* due to objections from Michael Jackson's estate, we've been daydreaming about what other music celebrities would make awesome zombies in the game.

RED-HEADED ZOMBIE
SPECIAL POWER:
This slow-moving foe clouds up surrounding spaces so that players can't see incoming zombies.

GLAMAZOMBIE
SPECIAL POWER:
This zombie *ch-ch-ch-changes* into a random zombie form once it takes its first step into your garden.

TEEN-IDOL ZOMBIE
SPECIAL POWER:
Every so often, this enemy attracts a gaggle of pig-tailed imps.



IV THINGS WE DON'T WANT IN THE NEXT GOD OF WAR

We're colossal *God of War* fans, but there are some things in the series we're flat out sick of....

I BIGGER EVERYTHING
▶ Look, we dig the epic scale of *God of War,* but quadrupling the total number of enemies onscreen at once—or increasing the size of bosses—only goes so far.

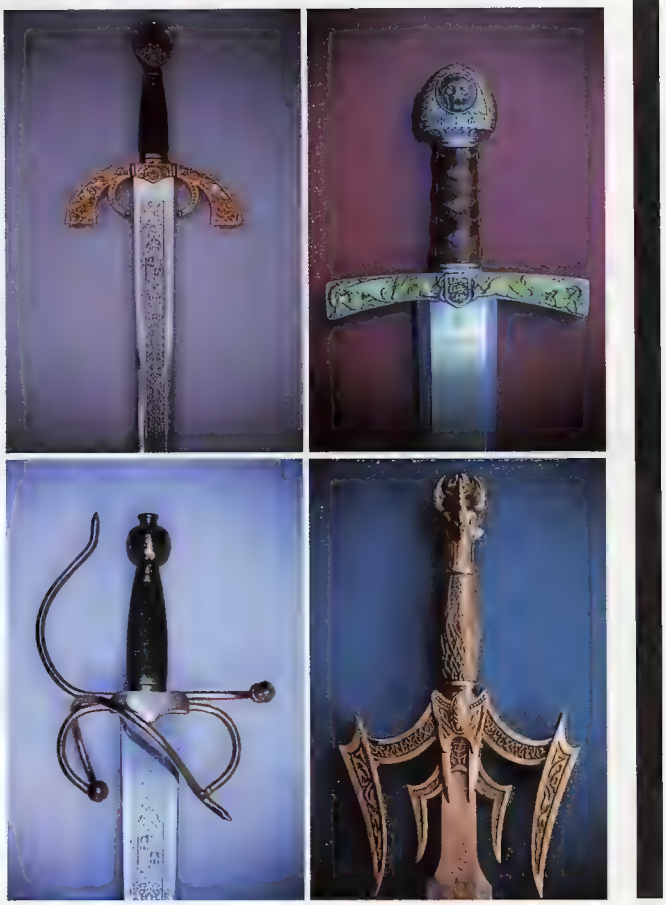
II POINTLESS PUZZLES
▶ 'Nuff said.

III KRATOS' ETERNAL TORMENT
▶ *We get it.* Dude is pissed. We're not saying we want Kratos to stop killing and become a Buddhist monk or anything, but the whole "I hate my father, Zeus" thing is getting way old.

IV GREEK GODS
▶ It might sound like blasphemy, but we're starting to run out of interesting mythological figures for Kratos to slay. How about he goes after the Norse or Egyptian gods next?

ONE MORE REASON IT MUST BE AWESOME TO WORK AT BLIZZARD

Working at Blizzard definitely has its perks... such as these swords and shields that the *World of Warcraft* developer awards to employees after 5, 10, and 20 years of service. By contrast, *GamePro* employees get a free day-old donut at each of those milestones. No jellies.



PHOTOS BY THOMAS L. HICKS VIA BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT

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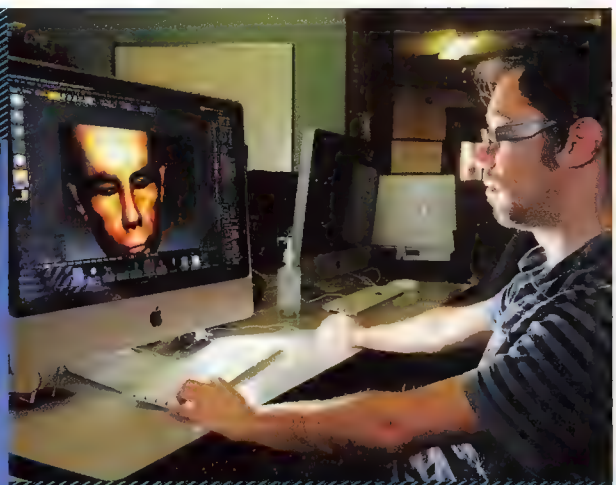

Get in the game.

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Be the change. Be the future. Be at Becker.

WHAT IF VIDEO GAMES WERE NOVELS?

WILL HERRING imagines a different world where games are better as books.

Professor Layton and the Blood Diamond's Curse

"Sir, if you'll just listen to me," choked Layton as the blood filled his failing lungs. A crunch, then a gurgle rose from his throat as he hacked out a scattershot series of wet coughs. The bloody taste of dried copper overwhelmed his gentleman's palate. "Just put the gun down, and we can talk."

The mustached man scoffed, forced the cold barrel of his revolver to Luke's trembling temple, knocking the boy's trademark cap clear from his head. He playfully stroked the gun's trigger, his devilish sneer widening in sync with the insane gleam in his one good eye.

"Professor, don't!" Tears streamed down the young ward's icy cheeks, leaving a spiderweb of sorrow on his pink flesh. The boy shifted his trembling gaze to the oozing enchanted cobra bite in Layton's shoulder. He knew that if he couldn't get the Professor the antidote soon, they were both as good as dead.

Layton gritted his teeth and spat in bloody protest at the madman's muddy boots.

"What will it take? What do you want?!" His weary, forced voice echoed from the top of the bell tower, reverberating down to the cobblestone city streets below.

The mustached man smiled a Cheshire grin. His voice was a raspy croak, each word a rusted window opening into some forbidden abyss. His glass eye gazed into Layton, seemed to pierce the professor's very essence, as if to say *"You've used up your last hint."*

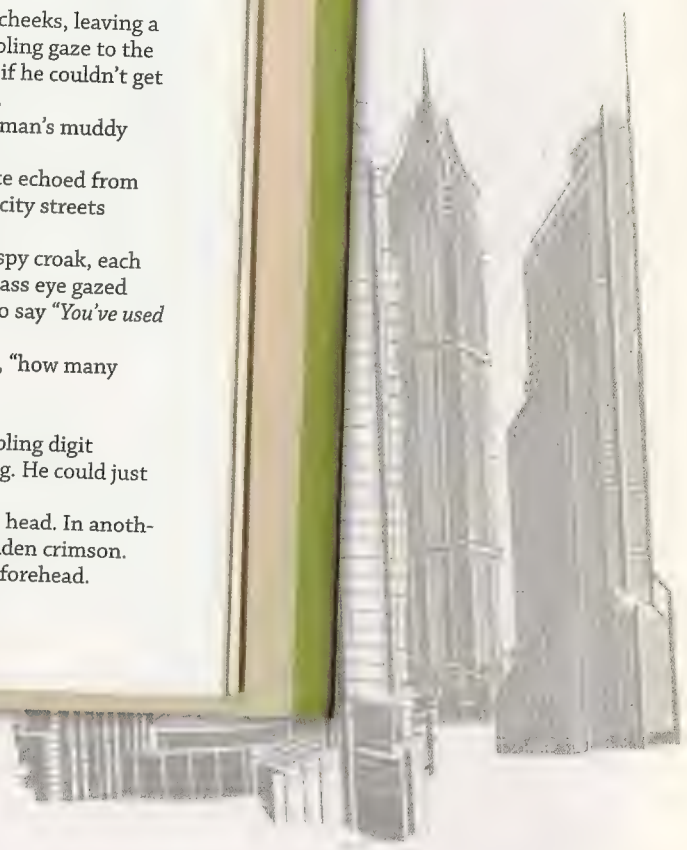
"If I haff nine matchstick," he sneered through his thick accent, "how many matchsticks is it taking to make matchstick dog vit dem?"

Layton smirked. He'd heard this one before.

"This should do the trick," he chuckled to the madman. A trembling digit fumbled the top hat at his feet, subtly slid back the cap's felt lining. He could just barely feel the gleaming blade of the concealed bowie knife.

In one swift flick of the wrist, Layton placed his hat back on his head. In another, the mad man dropped his revolver, collapsed into a pool of sudden crimson. He didn't even feel the needlepointed knife enter the crook of his forehead.

"Consider yourself solved," he smirked as the lifeless....



Katamari Damacy: Requiem
Chapter Sixteen

It was one word, and one word only, that impelled my puny frame as I pushed my mountainous Katamari up the steep precipice of the ceramic kitchen table. It was one word that transformed my blood into high-octane motor oil; my hands into industrial-strength engines that could split the Earth's girth in twine; my joints into slick, squeaking cogs, endlessly spinning in sync with one another; my mind into a laser-focused machine born of raw ambition, powered by the sheer magnitude of my unwavering will.

Father.

One might think that my Sisyphean royal duties would grow easier over time, or at least become more manageable as I rolled with and toiled within my studded spherical shackles, day in and day out. The truth of the matter, though—the grisly, shameful, unadulterated truth—was that, as long as *he* was a fool and an imposter to the throne, deservedly rotting in this cluttered nether realm of organic minutiae and fiendishly catchy theme music.

"Woof, woof!"

My splintered soles screeched to a halt, and my nerves glazed over with the frigid frost of sudden doubt. I'd been spotted by this beast before— this colossal, carnivorous canine— as a trespasser on turf not my own. It never ended well.

"Stand down, beast!" I shouted as I backpedaled one, two, three steps. "I am the Prince of All Cosmos, heir to the Solar Throne! Would you dare invoke my unholy royal wrath?"

A sniff, a snarl, and the creature was upon me with a primeval growl that popped goose-flesh on every inch of my body. I rolled with all my might, my aching muscles pressed to their utmost as my Katamari bumped and bounced past the beast. A siren seemed to swell behind the mayhem, growing louder and more horrendous with each passing moment.

"You would rob me of my birthright?" I shouted over the uproar—to whom, I'm not quite sure. "You would declare me unfit for the throne? What will it take, father? When will I be worthy?!"

Then it happened. A prodigious paw struck my Katamari, sending first a Shogi piece, then a sushi roll, then a half-dozen cassette tapes scattering from its sticky globular frame. Then, a sound that sent shockwaves throughout every inch of my being:

"All righty, time's up," boomed the King of All Cosmos.

Tiny Tower: The Official N

Chapter One

Leo Palmer was rarely more aware of his eventual descent into the Great Nothing than when he was home alone in his apartment. He sat by himself on his flaccid futon, a phone receiver clamped to his ear. But lonely Leo couldn't bring himself to dial a single digit. After all, who was there to call? He had everything he needed right here in Tiny Tower.

Instead, Leo just sat for a while, listening to the soothing, crackling calm of the static. Just listening, and waiting. And waiting. And wait—

BRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRNGGGG—

The leviathan cry of an alarm clock rocked Leo to his very core with its shrieking, hysterical siren. He squeaked in surprise, tapped the clock's "off" switch with a shaky singular finger, and gulped for breath. Leo's knees creaked as he drew his mass from the futon's droopy bulk, and a slight, distraught whimper escaped from his throat as he propelled himself towards the front door, down the hall, and to the gluttonous maw of the second floor elevator.

The ancient elevator doors *crrrrreaked* open with a rusted death rattle, and a half-dozen familiar faces gazed towards lone Leo. He'd squinted and struggled over the years, and made a genuine effort to tell the other Tower tenants apart, but it was no use: After this long, everyone just looked the same. A novelty hat here, some ironic or offbeat facial hair there...Leo knew that, despite their yearnings to break free, they were all permanent prisoners in this perfect purgatory.

"Going up?" inquired Brian, the perky patriarch of the Twelfth Floor Soda Brewery.

Where else would I be going? Leo imagined himself to ask with a flustered fervor. *I work two stories up, I shop four stories up, my mother lives eight stories up, and there's a new godforsaken floor every godforsaken day!* He would have worked up a visceral froth at his mouth now, jammed his thumb into the elevator's "emergency" button, and ripped his shirt to ribbons. *Where else would I be going but up, Brian?! Where else?!!!*

"You bet," Leo actually said, offering a shaky smirk. A single tear rolled down his cheek. "You...you bet."

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2012

THE YEAR IN PREVIEW

2011 MAY BE WINDING DOWN, WITH A LOT OF GREAT GAMES LEFT TO PLAY. BUT THAT'S NOT GOING TO STOP US FROM GETTING EXCITED ABOUT THE UPCOMING YEAR. HERE'S A LOOK AT THE GAMES WE WILL BE PLAYING RIGHT UP TO– AND DURING– THE MAYAN APOCALYPSE.

Final Fantasy XIII-2
Aliens: Colonial Marines
Borderlands 2
Darksiders 2
Diablo III
Prototype 2
Halo 4
Far Cry 3
The Last Guardian
Tomb Raider
BioShock Infinite
Dragon Quest X

Not everyone loves *Final Fantasy XIII*, but I do. From everything that's been announced so far, *Final Fantasy XIII-2* sounds like it's going to fix the game-structure issues that upset so many people while maintaining elements its predecessor does well. In particular, the *Chrono Trigger*–esque time-travelling should add plenty of replay value to the game thanks to variable outcomes—not something Japanese role-playing games are traditionally known for. The *Final Fantasy* brand is constantly growing and changing, and while some longtime fans might not like the way it's evolving, I appreciate Square Enix's willingness to experiment. —*Pete Davison*

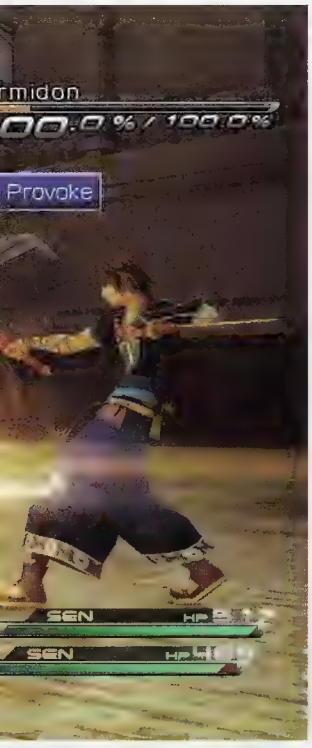
GAME I'M GOING TO SPEND THE MOST TIME WITH

Final Fantasy XIII-2

GAME I WOULD WAIT IN LINE AT MIDNIGHT FOR

Aliens: Colonial Marines

If the hype is true, *Aliens: Colonial Marines* truly will be the *Aliens* game I've waited my whole life for. More firmly rooted in the universe as presented in James Cameron's film, *Colonial Marines* should put us in the boots of the squad sent in to find out what happened to Ripley and the team that were dispatched to the desolate world of LV-426. Featuring all the familiar weapons and locales of the movie, gamers should feel like they are inside the sequel that was never made (but probably should have been instead of *Alien: Resurrection*). My inner 12-year-old can't wait. —*Tom Price*



GAME I DON'T REALLY UNDERSTAND BUT WANT TO PLAY ANYWAY

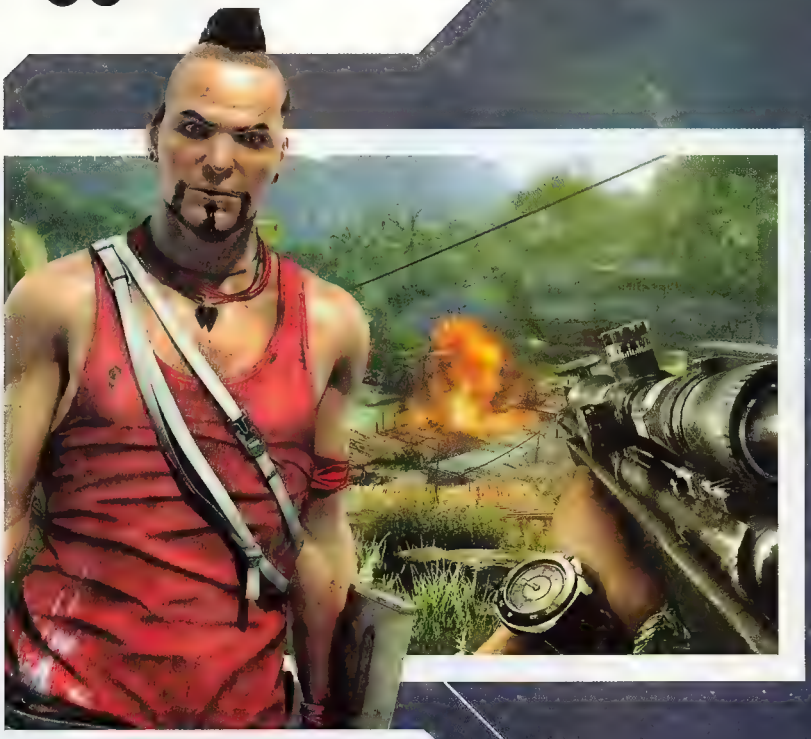
Prototype 2

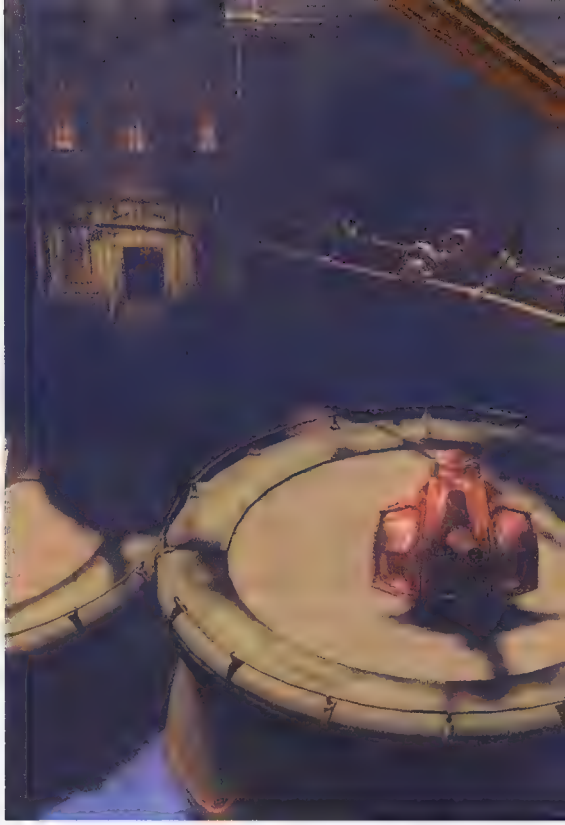
I never played the original *Prototype*, but I've been intrigued by the lore that's been tossed around and the chance to play as a morally ambiguous superhero. The second game looks to take the series in a more dystopic/monster-movie setting, at least from what I've gathered from the trailers and footage I've seen. I have no idea who I'm supposed to root for, who the bad guys are, or what the heck is going on with these various conspiracies and viruses. But like a moviegoer who stumbles into a film halfway through, I'm going to play this game and pester my friends with questions. *—Chris Holt*

GAME THAT MIGHT CONVINCE ME TO BELIEVE IN WII U

Dragon Quest X

Sure, Nintendo's next console will have a slew of familiar favorites: *Mario*, *Zelda*, and *Smash Bros.* But will it be more than just a platform for great Nintendo games? That's what I hope *Dragon Quest X* will prove. *DQIX* got plenty of my otherwise non-*DQ*-loving friends to tote around their DSes and go on epic quests with me. But while I don't expect anyone in the States to buy a Wii U solely on the power of this RPG franchise, it might be able to show off the resources available to third-party developers and Wii U's potential as an online gaming machine. *—Justin Haywald*





GAME I CAN'T WAIT TO MOD

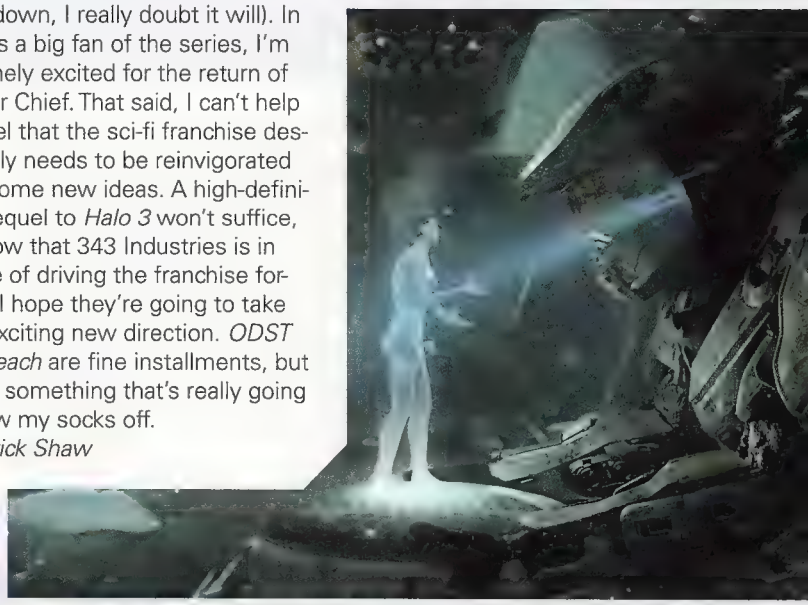
Far Cry 3

Games like *Far Cry* embody the power of PC gaming. Don't like the multi-player maps the developers put into the game? Make your own with its brilliant map editor. One of the greatest aspects of *Far Cry 2* is its map editor, and while it's not exactly easy to use, it is quite powerful. I'm eager to tinker with the maps Crytek comes up with—and excited to see what deathtraps other players brew up. Who cares about the campaign? I'm more interested in what the community does with *Far Cry 3*.
— *Jason Wilson*

GAME SERIES I FEAR WILL JUMP THE SHARK

Halo 4

Don't get me wrong. I certainly don't want *Halo 4* to flop (and deep down, I really doubt it will). In fact, as a big fan of the series, I'm genuinely excited for the return of Master Chief. That said, I can't help but feel that the sci-fi franchise desperately needs to be reinvigorated with some new ideas. A high-definition sequel to *Halo 3* won't suffice, and now that 343 Industries is in charge of driving the franchise forward, I hope they're going to take it an exciting new direction. *ODST* and *Reach* are fine installments, but I want something that's really going to blow my socks off.
—*Patrick Shaw*



GAME THAT WILL MAKE ME PROUD TO BE AN AMERICAN

BioShock: Infinite

Let's face it: The concept of "American Exceptionalism" has been dead in the water for some time now. Outside of a unifying memorial holiday here and there, this great nation of ours is often treated as "incidental" more than "exceptional." Which is one of the reasons I'm excited to climb aboard *BioShock: Infinite*'s floating city of Columbia...will its blood-craving crazies be able paint a suitably patriotic selling point of the ol' red, white, and blue for me? Or will it just be a fantastic FPS experience from the minds behind one of the most environmentally rich developers on the market? Honestly, I'll take either/or. *—Will Herring*

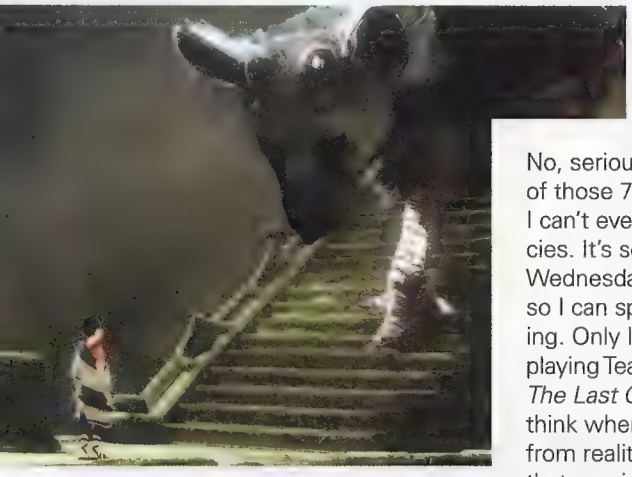
GAME I'M WORRIED ABOUT THE NEIGHBORS HEARING AT NIGHT

Tomb Raider

While the new direction for *Tomb Raider* is looking very promising in its authenticity, I'm worried that this panicked, chatty Lara Croft is going to make my neighbors think that I'm torturing a call girl with wild, violent sex. Even at this year's E3, everyone watching the Microsoft presentation got a little bothered by the heavy, almost sensual cries of pain throughout the demo. Now I'm worried that if I play this game at home with the speakers on, the San Francisco PD will knock down my door looking for a kidnap victim. Which is a bummer, because I really don't want to play the game on mute. *—McKinley Noble*

GAME I WILL CALL IN SICK TO PLAY

The Last Guardian

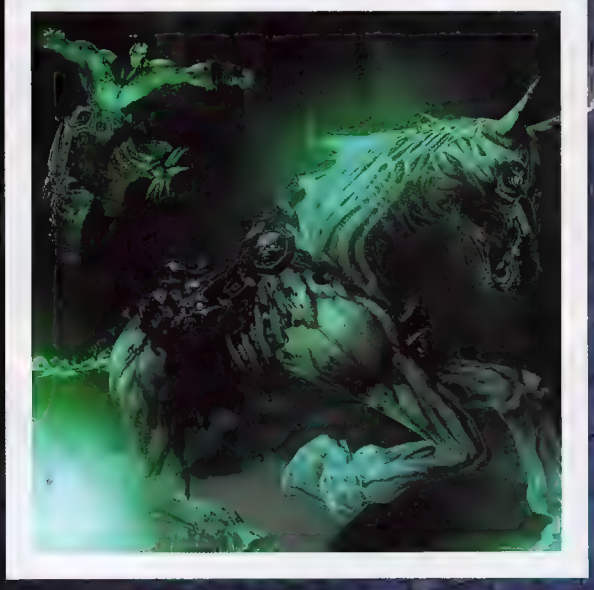


No, seriously, I have the flu. It's one of those 72-hour flu viruses where I can't even be called for emergencies. It's so bad, I have to take Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday off so I can spend the weekend recovering. Only I'm not *really* sick—I'm playing Team Ico's new game, *The Last Guardian*. I need time to think when I'm playing. I need space from reality. It's sure to be a game that requires a patient audience, one willing to absorb its contents without interruption, like the mind taking in silence in a moment of meditation. By Monday I'll be a new person.
—*Olivia Hubert*

Diablo 3

GAME THAT WILL DOUBTLESSLY BE DELAYED AGAIN. GAH.

After plowing through the supremely enjoyable *Diablo III* beta in less than a few hours, I felt like I'd been given a bijou taste-ette of something completely awesome—and then had it snatched away from me. I'm really impressed: It is fun, fast, and hectic. I love how intuitive and easy it is to play. How the storyline and questing are completely integrated into the action so there is no downtime and no feeling of having to mooch around running fetch quests like in some games. No—anything that needs to be fetched is usually at the end of a dungeon that's packed with horrible creatures you have to kill. *Diablo III* is almost all action, all of the time, and I loved it. Loot, leveling, and gaining skills seems to be a by-product of kicking ass, not grinding through dull quests. And now that I've had a taste of that awesomeness, I want the whole enchilada. I know Blizzard will doubtlessly delay it again and again, and when they do, you'll hear my cries of anguish. I'm jonesing, man. I need my fix. Gimme another taste, dude...c'mon.
—*Jaz Rignall*



GAME I THINK WILL SLIP UNDER THE RADAR (BUT BE AMAZING)

Darksiders 2

Darksiders 2 could be everything the original *Darksiders* should have been. The original is a perfectly serviceable brawler, but it relies too heavily on established conventions from *The Legend of Zelda* and *God of War*. But for the sequel, the team seems to be out to forge their own identity, and RPG elements, deeper combat, and a much larger world are at the top of their to-do list. Alas, it's not a military or sci-fi shooter, so it'll probably slip under the radar. But as someone who enjoyed the original game, this is a Day 1 purchase for me. —*Kat Bailey*

Games We Would Like to See Revealed in 2012

WE MAY NOT EVEN KNOW YET ABOUT SOME OF THE BIGGEST GAMES OF 2012, BUT WE KNOW WHAT WE WOULD LIKE TO SEE, AND EVEN HAVE REASONABLE EXPECTATIONS IN MOST CASES TO DO SO. HERE'S A LOOK AT SOME OF THE GAMES WE HOPE TO HEAR ABOUT IN 2012:

GRAND THEFT AUTO V

Rockstar's flagship series is guaranteed to continue, though what form it might take, what city it will be set in, and who our protagonist will be is a complete mystery. And we kind of like it that way. Nothing beats the surprise unveilings of *GTA* games.

THE NEXT HALF-LIFE THING-A-MA-BOB

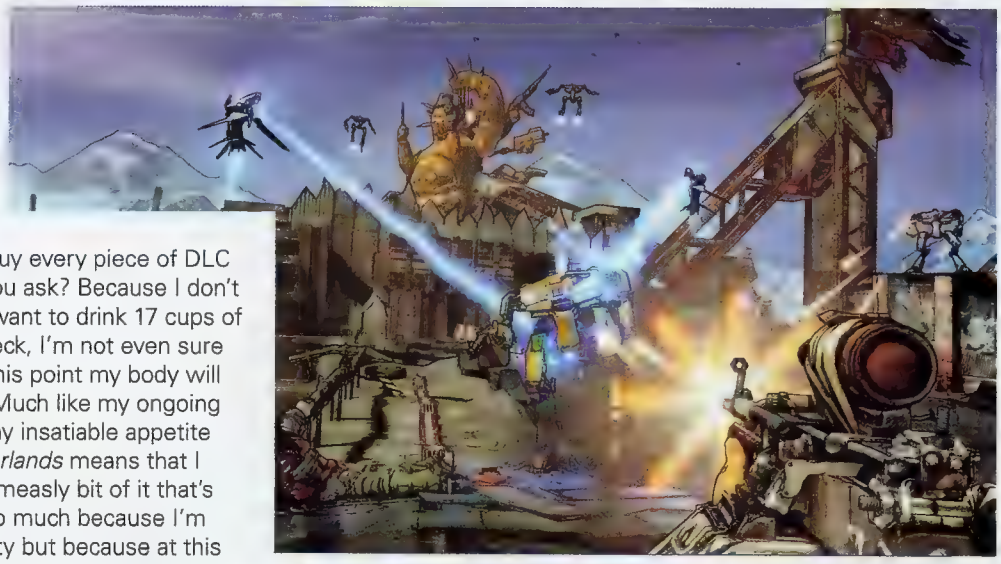
Despite Valve's denials of rampant and seemingly credible Internet rumors, there's no way the *Half-Life* series is over. The question is, will we get a peek at what's next this year—be it *Episode Three* or an actual full-on sequel—or will Valve bigshot Gabe Newell keep us waiting?

WHATEVER PATRICE DÉSILETS IS WORKING ON

The original creative force behind the *Assassin's Creed* series left Ubisoft quite some time ago for THQ's new Montreal studio. A noncompete clause has kept him on ice for awhile, but now that he's free and clear of that, we can't wait to see what he'll do with THQ's development money.

GAME I WILL BUY EVERY PIECE OF DLC FOR

Borderlands 2



Why am I going to buy every piece of DLC for *Borderlands 2*, you ask? Because I don't have a choice. Do I want to drink 17 cups of coffee a day? No. Heck, I'm not even sure I like coffee, but at this point my body will collapse without it. Much like my ongoing caffeine addiction, my insatiable appetite for everything *Borderlands* means that I will consume every measly bit of it that's offered to me, not so much because I'm confident in its quality but because at this point, I can no longer help myself. I. need. More. Guns. —*Emanuel Maiberg*

INSIDE THE MORBID MIND OF EPIC GAMES' **DR. FRANKENSTEIN:**

GEARS OF WAR'S MONSTER MAKER

WORDS BY PATRICK SHAW

Epic Games' Chris Perna was never a popular kid growing up. Ever since seeing F.W. Murnau's silent vampire film, *Nosferatu*, as a young child, Perna has sought comfort in the macabre. "I was shy and introverted," he confesses, describing himself as "a little scrawny kid." This is difficult to imagine now, as the man looks like he bench-presses Volkswagen Beetles every morning before going to work as *Gears of War*'s art director. "I would just take all my internal angst, and it comes out on paper," Perna says. "It's anger, and I push it through monsters, and it comes out."

"IT'S ALIVE"

"I BEHELD THE WRETCH—THE MISERABLE MONSTER WHOM I HAD CREATED...FEARING EACH SOUND AS IF IT WERE TO ANNOUNCE THE APPROACH OF THE DEMONICAL CORPSE TO WHICH I HAD SO MISERABLY GIVEN LIFE."

—VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN, MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN, OR THE MODERN PROMETHEUS*

Perna's inner source of creative inspiration hasn't changed much over the years. After all, he's given life to some of the most iconic monsters ever put into a video game: the Locust Horde from *Gears of War*.

Perna describes his process of creating fictional monstrosities as a purging of his own pent-up rage and aggression. "As I'm drawing or sculpting, I think about the creatures I'm creating and all the nasty things they can do. In my head, I'm listening to the sounds they might make, how they move around. And they're *always* angry," Perna says.

"I pour out my own stress into the artwork, and that leaves me feeling relaxed and calm," he adds. "Not sure how much sense that makes to anyone, but that's how I do it."

CONTINUED ▸

CHRIS PERNA: NUMBERS OF THE BEAST

40+ Different breeds of Locust in the *Gears of War* series.

Age 2 This is when Chris Perna says he became obsessed with horror.

1,000+ "Rare" horror films in Chris Perna's collection.

NOT YOUR TYPICAL OFFICE SPACE

As Epic Games' very own Dr. Frankenstein, Perna takes his role as head monster-maker very seriously. He's even christened his office—a lair crowded with life-sized disembodied creature heads and figurines—as "The Wicked Workshop."

"I don't even let my kids come in here," he says.

Perna describes The Wicked Workshop as a private and messy place he can go to draw, paint, and sculpt his creations. "Which are usually monsters of some kind," he says.

ABOMINATIONS OF DIGITAL FLESH

From role-playing series like *The Elder Scrolls* to horror franchises like *Resident Evil*, creating imaginative creatures that captivate gamers is important in all fantasy. And as the man responsible for dreaming up an immense range of creatures—from *Gears of War*'s almost cute, crab-like explosive Tickers to the mountain-sized Leviathan—Perna has his monster-making process down to a science.

He explains his monsters are born with just a sketch, and then they evolve into a life-sized head mold that he sculpts by hand. Later, the creatures get digitized and then put into the game.

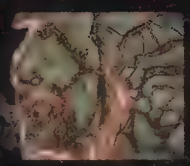
"I create a maquette to fully realize a concept I have for each creature," Perna says. "I want to see what a life-size version of the head might actually look like and feel like held in my hands."

EVOLUTION OF A MONSTER

Throughout the *Gears of War* trilogy, the Locust as a species have evolved in both their appearance and their behavior. Perna's taken advantage of the artistic opportunities that their changing bodies present, too. The new Lambent Locust introduced in *Gears of War 3* are a good example. A nastier mutation of the Locust, the Lambent can twist, stretch, and distend their bodies to overwhelm their enemies. "The Lambent are darker and have a burnt-flesh look," Perna says fondly of his grotesque offspring. "From an artistic standpoint, I want them to stand out from the average Locust creatures."

ART OF MONSTER MAKING

1. Brainstorm: Chris Perna conceives of a crude creature concept in his head.



2. Illustration: He draws a sketch of the creature.

3. Sculpture: Perna hand-sculpts a detailed mold (maquette) of the monster.

4. Digitization: The creature's basic shape, proportions, and features are put into a computer.

5. Final Design: Artists add textures, detail, and color to finally bring the monster to life.

STILL OPEN FOR BUSINESS

While the current *Gears of War* trilogy's story arc has come to a conclusion, we haven't seen the last of the *Gears* series. And Perna has plenty of creatures living inside his head that have yet to rear their hideous heads. He says we have "a lot more monsters" to look forward to.

CONTINUED ▶

GROTESQUERIES OF WAR

Gears of War's reptilian aggressors are anything but the same. Here's a look at over a dozen different types of Locust.

1. Drone
2. Butcher
3. Grenadier
4. Hunter
5. Boomer
6. Theron
7. Flamer
8. Cyclops
9. Kantus
10. Sniper
11. Savage Theron
12. Savage Grenadier

LEVIATHAN

These abominable aquatic adversaries are some of the deadliest creatures in all of *Gears of War*, and they often take several soldiers (and heavy firepower) to destroy.

NOSFERATU AND OTHER GHOULISH CREATIONS

Gears of War's Locust Horde are certainly Chris Perna's biggest contribution to monster-making. But he's created many other creatures outside of the *Gears* canon, such as the eponymous vampire that made a profound impact on him as a child: Nosferatu. We almost expect this eerie Nosferatu head sculpture to magically come to life and sink its crooked fangs into us. *Yeeeaaagh!*

THE FINAL FANTASY PRIMER

OR EVERYTHING YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT FINAL FANTASY BUT WERE AFRAID TO ASK BECAUSE IT MIGHT DING YOUR NERD CRED.

WORDS BY **KAT BAILEY**

We really can't get enough of *Final Fantasy*.

Over the years, the *Final Fantasy* series has woven itself into the fabric of gaming culture as surely and completely as Mario. We remember moments like Aeris's death and *Final Fantasy VI*'s opera scene, and we find ourselves humming "One-Winged Angel" on the way to work.

But what is it about the *Final Fantasy* franchise that has garnered its legion of dedicated fans around the world? Why is it arguably the only Japanese RPG series to have a truly global appeal?

One of the biggest reasons is that the series tells compelling stories in unique settings. Its character customization is deep, but it's not too complex, and the standalone nature of each *Final Fantasy* makes any title easy to pick up and play, making them approachable (and appealing) to all sorts of gamers.

But fundamentally, it's the fact that the series is consistently good. From the first game onward, *Final Fantasy* has provided some of the best and most original RPGs in gaming.

Over the following pages, we delve into the series, its settings, and its characters and highlight some of our favorite moments—to both celebrate the franchise and to help those who might be late to the party to best jump into *Final Fantasy* and experience its very best moments.

AND SO, MORE THAN 20 YEARS AFTER *FINAL FANTASY* FIRST MADE IT BIG IN NORTH AMERICA WITH ITS HIGH-QUALITY GRAPHICS AND SIMPLE (BUT FUN) BATTLE SYSTEM, THE ARGUABLY MOST POPULAR RPG FRANCHISE IN THE WORLD ENDURES.

BUT IF YOU'VE SOMEHOW MISSED OUT UNTIL NOW, HERE'S WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW—AND WHERE THE SERIES IS GOING FROM HERE.

A QUICK GUIDE TO THE FRANCHISE'S MOST NOTEWORTHY TITLES

FINAL FANTASY

Nintendo Entertainment System

It's the game that started it all in North America. Series tropes like the elemental crystals, the Four Fiends, and familiar classes like the Black Mage all make their debut.

FINAL FANTASY III

Family Computer

Final Fantasy III is frustratingly difficult and has a simple story, but it made its mark on series history by introducing the "Job System" that would dominate later games. It was finally released in the U.S. in 2006 on the Nintendo DS.

FINAL FANTASY IV

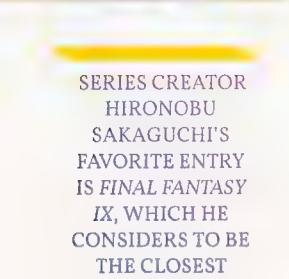
Super Nintendo

It started as *Final Fantasy II* in North America. Fast and easy to pick up, with a melodramatic story to boot, its semi-real-time "Active Time Battle" system has become a series standard. It's also known for its awful localization, where the grief stricken line "How could it have been anyone but you!" became "You spoony bard!"

FINAL FANTASY VI

Super Nintendo

It's the biggest and most ambitious SNES *Final Fantasy* and the first "modern" entry to boot. It ditched crystals and other series conventions for a huge cast and a sprawling story. It's a consensus favorite among old-school RPG fans.



FINAL FANTASY VII

PlayStation

It popularized Japanese RPGs in the West thanks to a cinematic approach that worked well on the PlayStation. It was the first RPG many Americans played, and requests for a high-definition remake continue to be fervent, to say the least. Contains one of the most famous death scenes in gaming history.

SERIES CREATOR HIRONOBU SAKAGUCHI'S FAVORITE ENTRY IS *FINAL FANTASY IX*, WHICH HE CONSIDERS TO BE THE CLOSEST TO HIS IDEAL VIEW OF WHAT THE SERIES SHOULD BE.

FINAL FANTASY XI

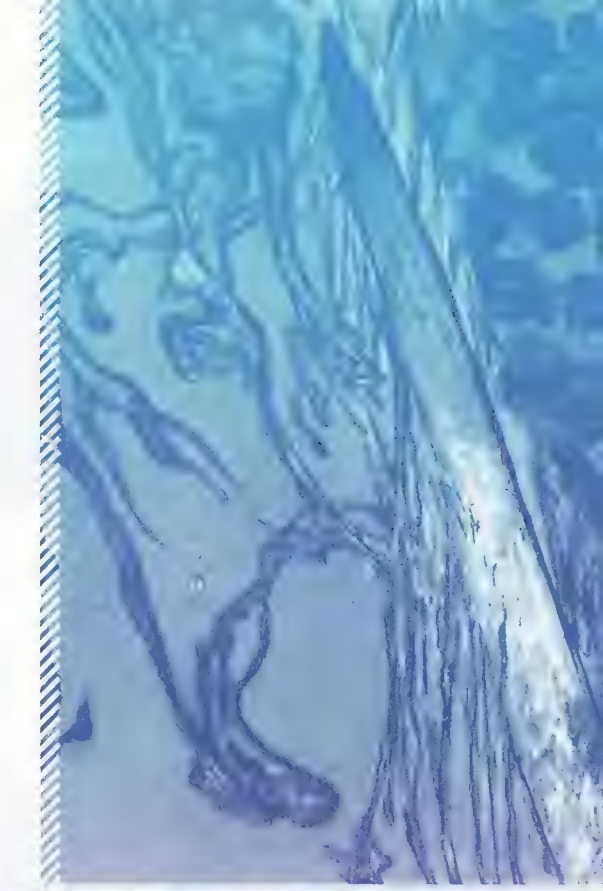
PlayStation 2

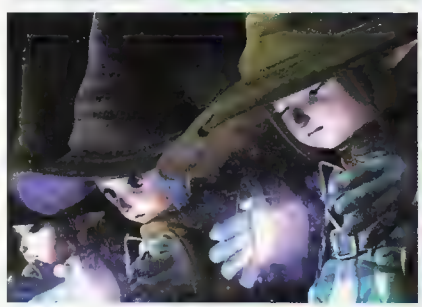
It's arguably the first (and only) truly successful console MMORPG. Decried by traditional fans, it's a sentimental favorite of MMORPG fans who remember it for its tough-as-nails difficulty.

FINAL FANTASY XIII

PlayStation 3

The most recent of the mainline *Final Fantasy* releases is notable for its beautiful graphics and a unique battle system, but fans lambaste it for its extreme linearity and lack of customization. Square Enix is trying to make amends with *Final Fantasy XIII-2*.





A FEW CHARACTERS YOU SHOULD KNOW

CECIL
Final Fantasy IV

Cecil is the first of *Final Fantasy*'s many tormented protagonists. His best moment comes when he faces the source of his anguish head-on and casts away his former identity as a Dark Knight. The correct pronunciation of his name rhymes with "vessel."

GILGAMESH
Final Fantasy V

He's a sympathetic villain as well as a source of comic relief. After serving as a major recurring boss in *Final Fantasy V*, he pops up regularly in subsequent entries as well as remakes. Gilgamesh has served as an ally, an enemy, and even a summon.

CELES
Final Fantasy VI

Final Fantasy VI has a ridiculously huge cast, but fans fondly remember Celes as being one of the best of the bunch. A clever magic user, a brilliant military leader, and a great opera singer to boot, Celes is also one of the series' more emotionally complex characters.

CLOUD
Final Fantasy VII

Best known for his spiky hair and gigantic Buster Sword, Cloud started off as a deconstruction of the badass in *Final Fantasy VII* and then became a purer form of the trope in *Kingdom Hearts*. He's easily the most recognizable *Final Fantasy* character.

SEPHIROTH
Final Fantasy VII

The big baddie of *Final Fantasy VII*, Sephiroth is mainly known for having some serious mommy issues. Still, his long silver hair and massive katana are his most iconic features. Having some of the best final boss music in the history of video games helps, too.

TIDUS
Final Fantasy X

He's the latter-day *Final Fantasy* protagonist—the skilled, somewhat girlish-looking (*bishounen*) fighter who spends a lot of time crying over his problems. Love him or hate him, a Tidus-type character is in every mainline *Final Fantasy* after the 10th installment.

AERIS: THE MOST FAMOUS DEATH IN GAMING HISTORY

Aeris Gainsborough became one of the most famous characters in gaming history simply by dying. Even before *Final Fantasy VII* came out in the West, fans knew of her tragic demise. Despite Aeris being little more than a quest, cutscene, and love interest for Cloud, fans were so shocked by her death that many refused to accept it and resorted to desperate attempts to hack the game to revive her. It says something about the game's capability to make an emotional connection between the characters and the players. When Sephiroth stabbed her through the heart, gamers felt it.

THE DEATH OF AERIS WAS INSPIRED BY THE PASSING OF HIRONOBU SAKAGUCHI'S MOTHER DURING DEVELOPMENT. AFTERWARD, SAKAGUCHI WANTED TO DEPICT A "REALISTIC DEATH," HENCE THE LACK OF A RESURRECTION.

CONSTANT THREADS

While they have their similarities, each *Final Fantasy* takes place in an entirely different world, with a background and history all its own. Several common threads weave through the series, though, a few of which are listed below.

TECHNOLOGY

Even at its most medieval, *Final Fantasy* often incorporates steampunk tech of some sort. *Final Fantasy IV*'s heroes fly to the moon on a whale ship, *Final Fantasy VII* resembles *Blade Runner*, and even the innocuous original game has time travel and other sci-fi elements.

TONBERRYS

This green imp with a knife and a lamp doesn't look too threatening, but then it uses "Everyone's Grudge," and you're dead. The status-effect-inducing Marlboros and powerful Behemoths are also common foes.

SUMMON MONSTERS

These mythical beasts can curb-stomp enemies into submission after an impressive animation. Longtime favorites include Ifrit, Bahamut, and the ever-more scantily clad Shiva.

CHOCOBOS

They're the preferred mode of ground transit in *Final Fantasy*. These feathered steeds are recognizable by their cry of "Kweh!" and their bouncy theme song. And sometimes, you can breed them.

MOOGLES

They're the other *Final Fantasy* mascot. They're typically seen running the tutorials and the game's mail service, but Mog the Moogle is a playable character in *Final Fantasy VI*.

AIRSHIPS

Ranging from flying boats to starships, these mighty vessels are another preferred mode of transit. They typically appear near the end of the adventure—but not always.

FOR THE NEWBIE: WHICH GAMES SHOULD I PLAY? // THE ESSENTIALS

FINAL FANTASY IV

The first of the 16-bit *Final Fantasy*s is probably the best starting point, which may explain why it's been rereleased so many times. The lack of extensive customization means you won't be overwhelmed by numbers, and the fast pace of the combat and the story makes it hard to be bored. For best results, play the PSP version while avoiding the buggy GBA version and the "easy type" SNES original.

FINAL FANTASY VI

This is the franchise's crown jewel. It's one of the most ambitious Super Nintendo games ever made, and the score features series composer Nobuo Uematsu at his absolute best. Fans love it for characters like the thief Locke and the thoroughly insane Kefka, as well as the surplus of memorable moments (the opera scene, anyone?). The cherry on top is that it is also one of the best-looking games on the SNES—an all-around classic.

FINAL FANTASY VII

Controversial among hardcore fans, beloved by the general public, *Final Fantasy VII* is still the most recognizable and popular game in the series. The polygonal kewpie dolls are crude by today's standards, but it looks surprisingly good on a PSP. As with *Final Fantasy IV*, *FFVII* is both easy to play and fast-paced, making it a good entry point. Where it'll really get you is the incredibly complex story, which is as confusing now as it was in 1997.

// ADVANCED GAMING

FINAL FANTASY V

Anyone going from the light, fast-paced *Final Fantasy IV* to its sequel is apt to face some serious whiplash. It looks basically the same, but the customizable Job System is extremely dense, and the battles can be grueling. It has its fans, though, particularly those who appreciate good, stat-heavy RPGs. In a *Final Fantasy* discussion, this is the game that you mention when you want to show off your hard-earned fan expertise.

FINAL FANTASY IX

As the last of the single-digit *Final Fantasy*s, the ninth game is intended as a tribute to everything that came before it. Hence the superdeformed characters, the somewhat more medieval style, and the huge number of in-jokes. *Final Fantasy IX* is notable for its sense of humor, which makes for a refreshing change of pace compared to the more self-serious games like *Final Fantasy VII*. That said, it's best appreciated after you've had a thorough introduction to the series.

FINAL FANTASY XII

Final Fantasy XII is an incredibly interesting, forward-thinking RPG with a small but dedicated fanbase. But it's that same innovative design—it replaces turn-based combat with a more MMORPG-like approach—that turned off quite a few of the franchise's fans. Nevertheless, it's an extremely stat-driven RPG with some genuinely cool ideas. Play *Final Fantasy Tactics*, and then try *Final Fantasy XII* for yourself. You may be surprised.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR FINAL FANTASY?

With series creator Hironobu Sakaguchi long gone, *Final Fantasy* is at a crossroads. Current-generation entries like *Final Fantasy XIII* and the MMO *FFXIV* were critical disasters, and the *FFXIII* spinoff, *Final Fantasy Versus XIII*, has been consistently delayed.

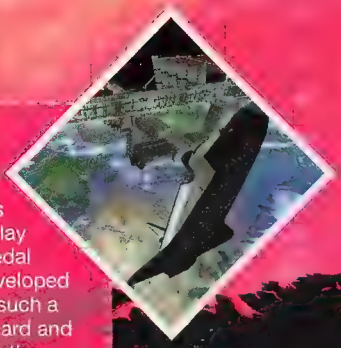
But earlier this year, Square Enix announced *Final Fantasy XIII-2*, which they hope will make good on some of the common complaints about *Final Fantasy XIII*. Among the promised features are towns—not exactly the most ambitious feature in the world, but it does seem to suggest that *XIII-2* won't be as rigidly linear as its predecessor. There's also *Final Fantasy Type-0* for the PSP, which has won praise for its team-based combat, dark story, and massive world.

THIS SURELY ISN'T THE LAST WE'LL BE SEEING OF THE VENERABLE FRANCHISE. OVER AT SQUARE ENIX, PLANNING HAS UNDOUBTEDLY ALREADY STARTED FOR *FINAL FANTASY XV*. AND WHEN IT ARRIVES, WE'LL STILL BE WAITING WITH OPEN ARMS.

The WIDE WORLD of Video Games

VIDEO GAMES ARE A GLOBAL PHENOMENON. BUT I BET YOU DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT WHAT'S GOING ON OUTSIDE YOUR BACKYARD.

WORDS BY **TOM PRICE**



CANADA

Educational games are now often referred to as "serious games," as they were at the Serious Play Conference in Redmond, WA. There, a gold medal was awarded to a game called *Robomath*—developed by the Canadian Space Agency (there really is such a thing) and Canadian developers Project Whitecard and Virtual Heroes—that's set to teach high level mathematics to over a million Canadian high school students in the coming year. Utilizing the Unreal Engine's 3D graphics that kids can more likely relate to, *Robomath* has them building components on the International Space Station by solving mathematical equations. It looks like a lot more fun than Mavis Bacon's typing, that's for sure.

You can finally play *Doom* and *Doom II* in Germany. At this rate, *Duke Nukem Forever* should come out there in about 25 years. And it will still suck.

If you miss the Smithsonian's "The Art of Video Games" exhibition, it is going on tour across the U.S. beginning in 2012. First stop: the Boca Raton Museum of Art (October 24–January 20, 2013).

CHILE

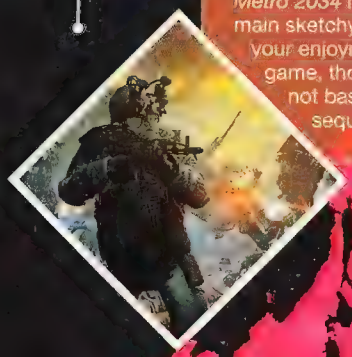
We're not sure if South America is the new hotbed for game development, but one of our favorite indie developers is down there. And if an industry builds up around them and is inspired by their distinct vision, then all the better. ACE Team is primarily known for the iconoclastic *Zeno Clash*, but their new game *Rock of Ages* looks pretty out there, too. Rolling around a big boulder isn't all that new, but doing it in levels inspired by different ages of art history is. Dang, Chile, you got cool video games, nice wine, and beautiful mountains. Maybe it's time to move.

DUBAI

If you're a gamer from the Middle East, it must get tiring to see your culture consistently portrayed as the bad guys in video games. If digital repesentations of your people and culture aren't getting shot by American soldiers, they're getting assassinated by a dude in a white hoodie. So it's good to see a developer from the region actually making games that celebrate Arabic culture. Dubai-based developer Quirkat first caught our attention with a *Guitar Hero* inspired music game based on the oud (aka the lute) called *Al-Moosiqar* back in 2009, but have also created bilingual strategy games set in the Middle East. Their latest, *Tawle*, presents 3 variations of backgammon played on ornate Arabesque boards.

RUSSIA

Metro: Last Light is the follow-up to the sleeper hit *Metro 2033*—both come from Ukrainian developer 4A Games, the people who brought us the similarly Russian-themed *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* But did you know that *Metro* is based on a series of very popular books by author Dmitry Glukhovsky? The English language version of *Metro 2033* came out earlier this year, but details about when a translation for *Metro 2034* might be released remain sketchy. This shouldn't effect your enjoyment of the next game, though; it's reportedly not based on the written sequel.



CHINA

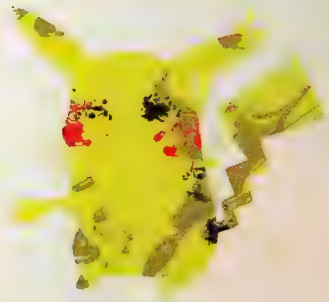
Miliary-themed shooters like *America's Army* or *Call of Duty* are mostly made with the western gamer in mind. That's why you're usually playing as a soldier of one of America's armed forces or our allies and usually killing various agents of our traditional global rivals. But the Chinese government and People's Liberation Army said screw that noise and developed their own propagandistic military shooter, featuring the aforementioned PLA taking it to the American forces in a fictional conflict. *Glorious Missions* is not something many American gamers will play, or even want to, but it's interesting to see the tables turned on us.

INDIA

When you think of Bollywood, you most likely imagine hundreds of people dancing in unison on some huge, elaborate set. But India's movie industry covers all kinds of subjects, like sci-fi, action, and, well, OK, people dancing. The first true Bollywood game is *Ghajin*, an action title that packed a lot of awful into its short and primitive gameplay. Hopes are much higher for *Ra.One*, a game based on a movie that's one of the most anticipated Indian films of the year.

Did you know there's a burgeoning game-developer scene in South Africa? Check out www.sagamedev.com to see what they're up to.

THE POWER OF COLOR



WITH SO MANY PLAYERS COMPLAINING OF ABOUT THE ABUNDANCE OF DRAB AND DREARY GAMES, TIMOTHY J. SEPPALA WENT ON A QUEST TO FIND JUST WHAT COLOR IN GAMES IS ALL ABOUT.

You're being controlled by color, whether you realize it or not. Fire trucks, stop signs, exploding barrels—they're all red because you're supposed to notice them. In the hands of a trained game developer, color has a more profound effect than you might imagine. In addition to being an information-delivery tool, color has the ability to create a certain mood and sell an intended emotion. With effective color use, you shouldn't know why you feel something, but only that you feel something. "For some reason, when you play games, you are either more or less moved based on the color theory," says Adrian Chmielarz, the creative director at People Can Fly. "You're thinking about [color], but you aren't aware of it."

BROWN IS THE NEW BLACK

A majority of gamers have seen war on the news for a depressingly large chunk of their lives. For better or worse, we've gotten used to it. "Most of the footage we've seen takes place in the Middle East somewhere: two Iraq wars, Afghanistan. Sand colors and dust colors are real ways we've experienced war in terms of the color palette," says Frank O'Connor, the franchise director for *Halo* at 343 Industries. "If you go back to Vietnam, you think of hot orange explosions and napalm and dark, shadowy greens. World War II we think of in terms of black and white. Literally, people have experienced war with what they're exposed to in the way the rest of the media portrays it—not just video games."

The influence of real-world conflict is evident in the color palette of many games today; brown environments evoke a sense of melancholy. "On a psychological level, brown is pretty much shorthand for depressing," says Kenneth Scott, a senior art director at 343 Industries. "It puts you in a despairy, tormented mind space."

BRIGHTEN UP YOUR DAY

Two of Insomniac Games' biggest franchises, *Resistance* and *Ratchet and Clank*, couldn't have more opposite color palettes. *Ratchet* relies on its bright and cheerful color selection to appeal to the younger audience Insomniac targets, whereas *Resistance* is going for a much more depressing feel with its alien invasion tale. Would the two series be as effective if they swapped palettes? "I think it'd make *Ratchet* into an M-rated game!" laughs Grant Hall, Insomniac's art director. *Ratchet* is going for a Saturday morning cartoon feel that the *Resistance* franchise's grays and browns can't emote.

SATURATION POINT

Beyond narrative, developers use color as an information-delivery tool. *Uncharted 2* pushed saturation levels through the roof during Drake's dream sequences, telling the player what they were watching was on a different timeline than the main game without actually saying it. This design choice is because memories are often warmer and more idealized in our minds than the actual events they draw from. Another trick developer Naughty Dog employs in the series is desaturating the scene as Drake takes more and more damage. A subtle clue like this eliminates the need for an onscreen readout.

CHAOS THEORY

Too much color can be a problem, as an overabundance of it creates chaos. One upside to working with a monochromatic color palette is that it's easier to guide the player's experience. Directing your eye to a particular area is as easy as adding a splash of color (think of a boss's glowing weak spot). But when the entire environment is colorful—à la Bulletstorm—it can quickly devolve into confusion if not handled properly. "When you shoot for that really saturated goal, you have to be five times more careful how much data you throw at the player and how those colors work together harmoniously," Irrational Games' Nate Wells says. "When you enter into a saturated game, you enter into a bargain with the player's brain. The more you introduce local saturated color, the less order the world has."

PRAYING THE GRAY AWAY

Games in the early '90s were very colorful and heavily saturated. Irrational Games' Art Director Nate Wells says developers strayed from traditional happy Japanese color schemes to "mature games up," bringing about a new era for the medium. Everyone is quick to pile on *Gears of War* for this, but a monochromatic color palette is one of the easiest ways to sell a tone of despair. It was new and successful at the time, so many other games followed suit. Color—or lack thereof—is a key tool in storytelling.

But some don't think games need to be drab to sell a somber narrative. "[There was a theory] if games were going to get serious, they had to get dark and gray and desaturated," Wells says. "We never felt that way, but there probably was a perception that bright colorful games would be saccharine and they couldn't be tough."

"WHEN YOU START OUT WITH A WIDER COLOR PALETTE, YOU HAVE MORE OPTIONS TO CREATE DISTINCTION BETWEEN LEVELS."

—Frank O'Connor, *Halo* franchise director, 343 Industries

THE FULL SPECTURM

Gears of War 3's noticeably wider palette is a good example. On paper, there's nothing happy about the story: Humanity makes its last stand as Sera's pushed to the brink of destruction.

Traditional thinking in terms of color would suggest *Gears 3* should be as gray as possible. But the injection of color allows it to convey a broader set of emotions. That alone makes it a "much more ambitious project" than previous *Gears*, says Chmielarz.

Developers are more conscious of color's power than ever before due to formal training as well as the maturation both of their talents and the medium. Today's hardware allows for more complex color palettes, which lead to richer emotional experiences. Cinema has been using conscious color choices to sell mood for nearly a century. With games finally catching up to this technique, players stand to benefit greatly—whether or not they even know it.

COLOR IS A SUBTLE CLUE THAT TELLS YOU WHERE YOU ARE IN THE STORY. IT CAN ACTUALLY BE QUITE CLARIFYING FOR THE AUDIENCE.

—KEN LEVINE

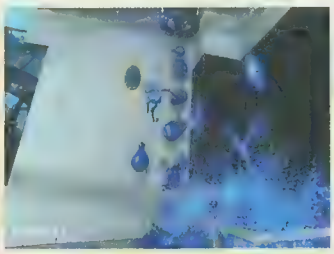
CREATIVE DIRECTOR AND COFOUNDER OF IRRATIONAL GAMES.

COLOR ME INTERESTED

WESTERN COLOR PSYCHOLOGY PLAYS A HUGE ROLE IN THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF GAMES. HERE ARE A FEW EXAMPLES OF WHAT COLORS MEAN AND HOW THEY CAN AFFECT YOU.

RED

A power color used to grab your attention. Also indicates danger and can even raise blood pressure (e.g.: exploding barrels; entire rooms painted red near the end of *Mirror's Edge*).

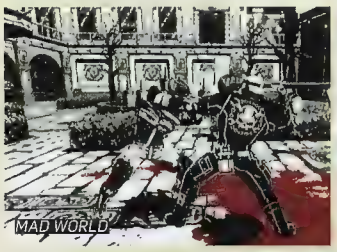


BLUE

Causes the opposite physical reactions of red. Also instills loyalty and is considered cold and depressing (e.g.: grenade arc in *Gears of War*, Mario's overalls, *Portal*'s portals).

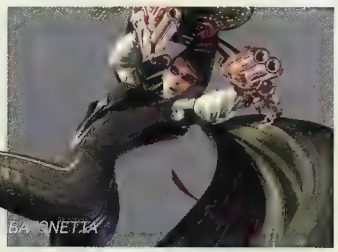
YELLOW

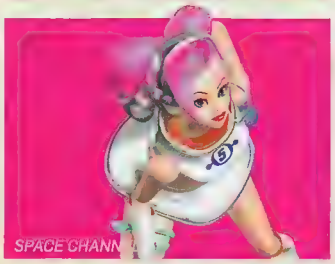
An optimistic color that somehow causes people to lose their temper and babies to cry more when in rooms painted this hue (e.g.: *Alien Hominid*'s Alien, *Halo*'s fuel rod gun, objectives in *Call of Duty*).

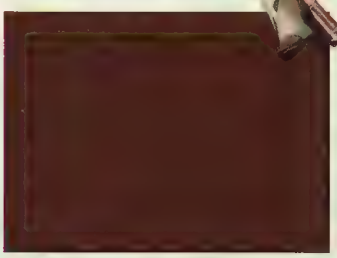


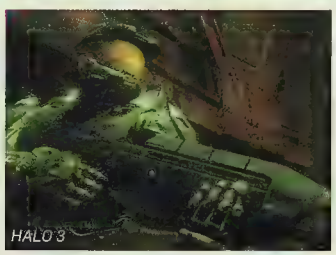
WHITE

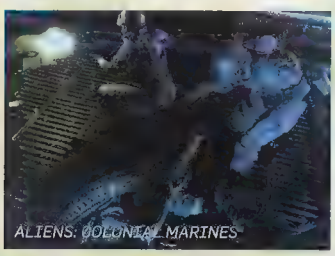
Represents purity and innocence. Because it reflects light and color, developers have to be careful about its use and placement in games (e.g.: Wii hardware; medical bay aboard *Mass Effect 2*'s *Normandy SR-2*).

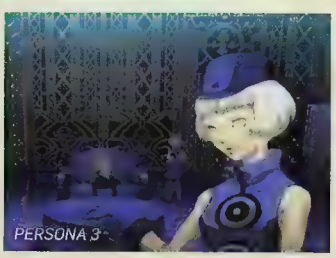












BLACK

A color of power and authority. Priests wear it as a sign of their submission to God. Black clothing can make you look thinner (e.g.: Darth Vader; Ryu Hayabusa's outfit in *Ninja Gaiden*).

BROWN

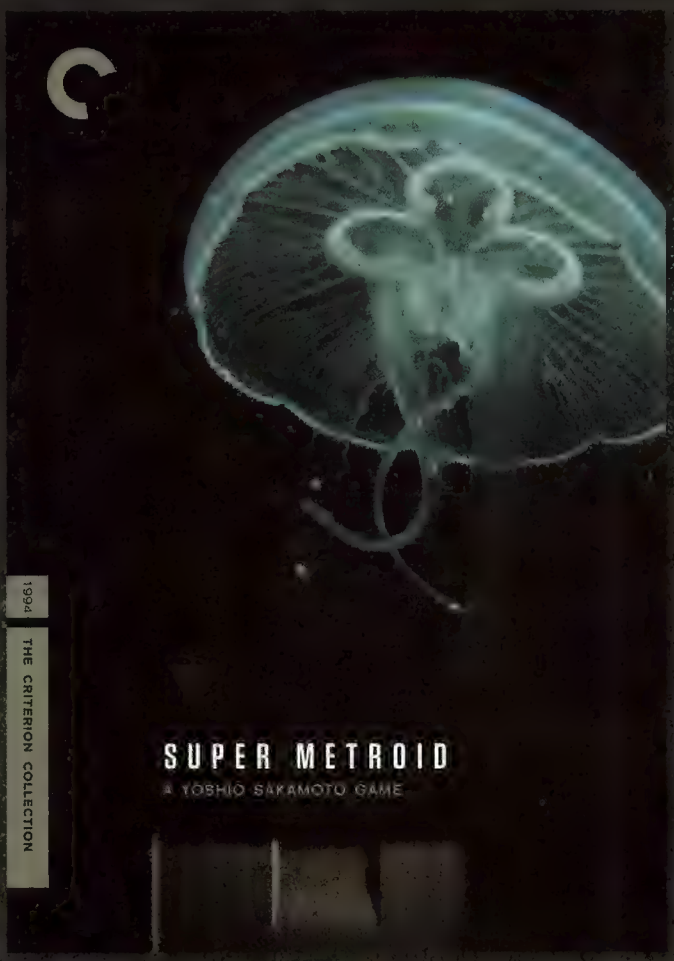
Have you been paying attention to the rest of this article? Brown sells a feeling of depression and despair (e.g.: Early areas in *Resistance 3*'s campaign, all of *Medal of Honor* [2010], *Rage*).

GREEN

Typically very relaxing. Often associated with the military, nature, and inexperience (e.g.: Master Chief; everything about *Enslaved*'s apocalypse, the Xbox brand itself).

PURPLE

The color of royalty. Also considered feminine and romantic (e.g.: *Halo*'s Covenant elites are purple because it's on the exact opposite on the color spectrum as the UNSC's green).



1995 THE CRITERION COLLECTION

THE SUPER NES CRITERION COLLECTION

THE REMASTERED EDITIONS OF OUR DREAMS

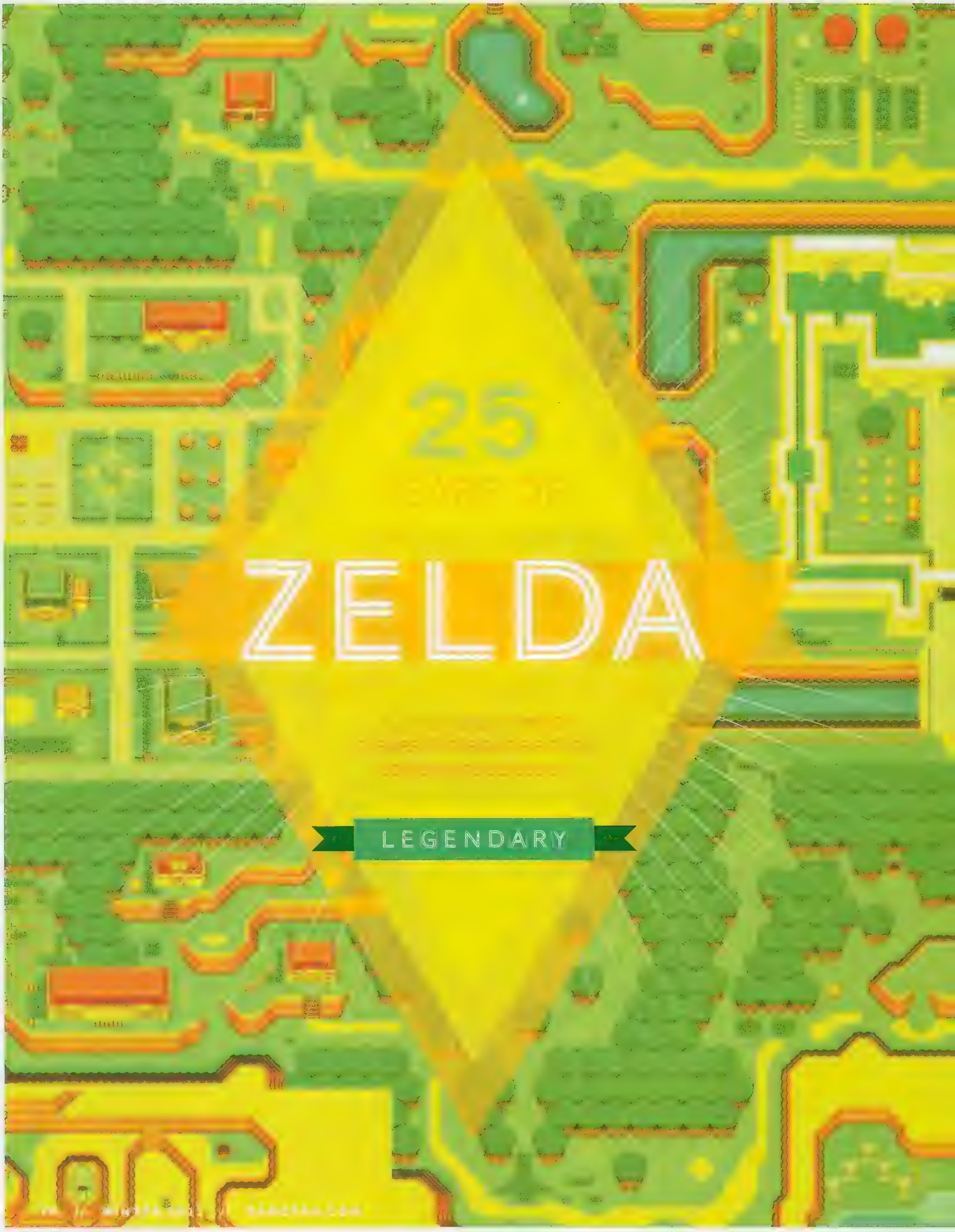
IT'S TIME FOR THE FINEST GAMES OF NINTENDO'S 16-BIT ERA TO GET THE CLASSY TREATMENT.

What if Nintendo, Capcom, and other SNES developers got together and created their version of the Criterion Collection? And what if they included audio commentary, documentaries, featurettes, and other incredible extras?

With that in mind, we selected a few titles that deserve a complete remastering, from new boxart and HD visuals to commentaries and other extra goodies.

EARTHBOUND

A SHIGESATO ITOI GAME


25
ZELDA
LEGENDARY

ONCE UPON A TIME...

Link may not quite be the Nintendo platform mascot and household name that Mario is—heck, he is only sometimes mentioned in the titles of his own games—but he is, without a doubt, one of the most iconic video-game characters of all time.

Everyone—including your mom—knows Mario. But Link is special; those who played *The Legend of Zelda* discovered the power games have to take you to new worlds and invest you emotionally in epic tales. 2011 is the 25th anniversary of the original release of *The Legend of Zelda*, so to mark the occasion, we take a look back at some of our favorite moments of the series and look ahead to what adventures lie in store for the little elf boy.

MY FAVORITE ZELDA GAME

For many fans, it's hard to choose their favorite, considering that pretty much all of the *Zelda* games range from good to great. But some hold bigger places in our hearts than others.

LINK'S AWAKENING DX

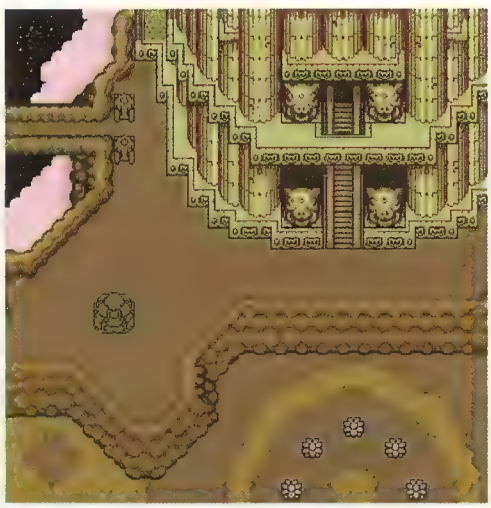
While it literally took me years to get through *The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening*, I didn't really love the original as much as I do now until the GameBoy Color version. The upgraded *Link's Awakening* renders everything in color, adds two new cloaks to a secret dungeon in the cemetery, and tacks *DX* to the end of the title. That you can play it anywhere more than makes up for its lack of beefy story. It's 16-bit *Zelda* on the go. —*Olivia Hubert*

MAJORA'S MASK

Majora's Mask is Link meets Sherlock. Forcing you to play with a time limit usually relegates a game to the frustrating pile of "games I'm not going to waste my time on." But here, you could see the moon literally getting closer with each passing hour. Nintendo took a chance, and they produced something brilliant. —*Justin Haywald*

MY FAVORITE ZELDA PLACES

The characters, enemies, and storyline wouldn't matter as much if the settings of the *Zelda* games weren't so compelling. Here are some of our favorite places in the "Zelda-verse."



DEATH MOUNTAIN

My favorite *Zelda* locale is the top of Death Mountain in *A Link to the Past*. Although it only uses a simple parallax effect, I found the sense of altitude to be enormously convincing, and being able to see the distant landscape below helped make Hyrule a convincingly coherent world. —*Pete Davison*

WATER TEMPLE

The Water Temple exemplifies everything that's good about *Zelda* games—lots of devious puzzles, fantastic music and visuals that complement their setting, the use of lots of different pieces of equipment, and the reward of a fantastic gadget (in this case, the Hookshot). Now, I need to try it in 3D.... —*Jason Wilson*

ZELDA'S WEIRDEST MOMENTS

The *Zelda* games have been such a phenomenon, that you can't blame Nintendo for wanting to cash in. On the other hand, maybe they should have thought twice about a couple of these licensing deals that didn't exactly do right by the brand.

Cartoons

The Legend of Zelda TV series aired as a part of *The Super Mario Bros. Super Show!* back in 1989, and it's one of the few times where you can actually hear Link and Zelda talk, voiced by a couple of B-movie actors from Canada (of!!!). For the morbidly curious, the shows were remastered on DVD in the early 2000s.

i.CD Games

The first of the liquid crystal display (or LCD) versions of a *Zelda* game was actually made by Nintendo. But after the *Zelda Game & Watch* was released in 1989, a bunch of other, more inferior licensed games were made for LCD displays, including one built upon the *Barcode Battlers II* platform from Japanese toy company Epoch involving trading cards.

Philips CD-i games

The checkered history of the Philips CD-i – a 1990s video game console that failed spectacularly – was not helped at any way by its officially licensed *Zelda* games. "Officially licensed" here can also be taken to mean "Nintendo sold the name and then washed their hands of those abominations." They may have featured Link and Zelda in two of them, and actually the antagonist, but that's where the similarities end.

MY FAVORITE SIDE CHARACTER

Link and Zelda—and even Ganon—make up the core of almost every *Zelda* adventure. But sometimes the side characters are what really make the games memorable.

SHEIK

Sheik is one of the first truly badass characters you encounter, with sweet ninja skills and some sweet chops on the lyre. But it's the revelation of who Sheik really is that makes, um, his appearance so memorable. It's one of many unexpected moments in *Ocarina of Time*, and it's easily one of the most memorable.
— *Tom Price*

EPONA

Epona is probably the most famous video-game steed this side of Agro, the horse that stars in *Shadow of the Colossus*. After winning her over at Lon Lon Ranch in *Ocarina of Time*, she becomes Link's most trusted companion as she bears him across the ruined future Hyrule. Though she may not be able to speak, she's still one of Zelda's most memorable characters.
—*Kat Bailey*

TOOLS OF LINK'S TRADE

I WANT ONE!

As an adventurer, Link has a host of weapons, tools, and other neat items to help him solve puzzles and defeat certain enemies. They've changed over the games, but very often, they've stayed pretty much the same. Here are some of the most notable items he uses.

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

Link is a very musically inclined little fellow, with a penchant for finding instruments with magical powers.

OCARINAS | A number of these small clay flutes appear in games other than *Ocarina of Time*. There's also the Ocarina of Wind from *The Minish Cap*, and an ocarina is central to *Link's Awakening*.

WIND WAKER | Though it doesn't actually make any sound, a conductor's baton is still a kind of musical instrument. Use it and music happens! Also, wind.

LYRE | Sheik uses a lyre (like a primitive guitar) in *Ocarina of Time* to teach Link songs. But in *Skyward Sword*, you can use the Wii Motion Plus to play a lyre.

SHIELDS

Another core element of Link's weapon set, the shield appears in three forms in the Zelda universe: Wooden (often the first one you get), Durable (they are more, um, durable), and Mirrored (for redirecting beams to solve puzzles, usually).

BOOTS

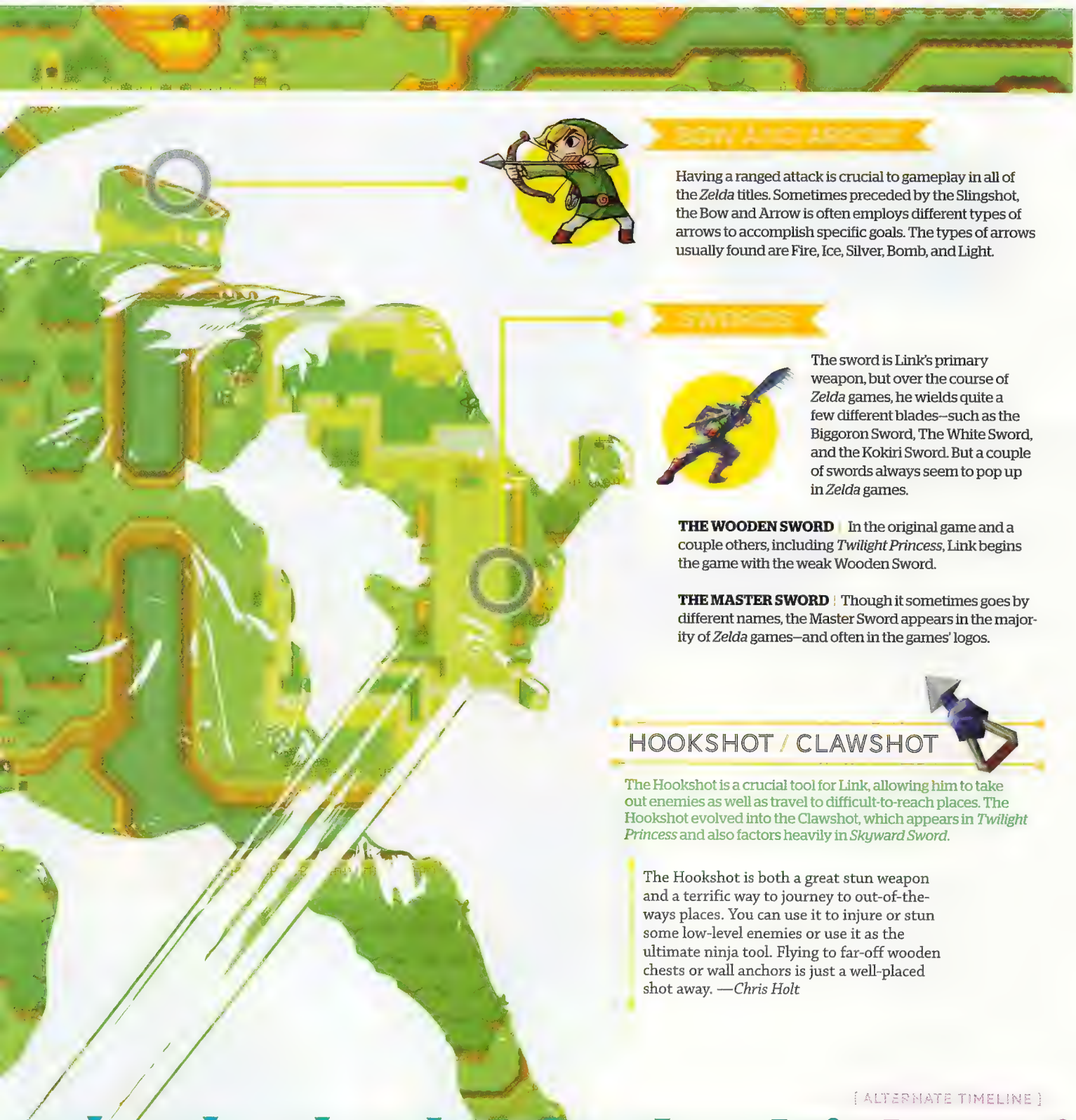
Link often uses special boots to access certain areas. For instance, the Hover Boots let you walk on water, and the Iron Boots let you sink into it (very important in the Water Temple of *Ocarina of Time*). The most commonly acquired boots in the series, though, are the Pegasus Boots, which allow Link to move as fast as the mythological winged horse (OK, maybe not that fast).

> Gamers are likely split on these cumbersome clogs (the constant reequipping of them in *Ocarina of Time*'s Water Temple is an unpleasant memory for many), but the Iron Boots remain one of the most practical parts of Link's extended wardrobe. And, come on—footwear that lets a lithe elf take down a gargantuan Goron in a sumo wrestling match can't be all that bad. —*Will Herring*

A CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS IN THE LEGEND OF ZELDA SERIES

Fans are sharply divided over the order of events in the *Zelda* universe, so this timeline will undoubtedly have it's detractors. The only person who really knows is Link, and that guy never says a word.

- THE MINISH CAP (GBA, 2005)
- SKYWARD SWORD (Wii, 2011)
- OCARINA OF TIME (N64, 1998)
- OCARINA OF TIME 3D (3DS, 2011)
- MAJORA'S MASK (N64, 2000)
- TWILIGHT PRINCESS (Wii, GC, 2006)
- FOUR SWORDS (DSi, 2002)
- FOUR SWORDS ADVENTURES (GC, 2004)
- A LINK TO THE PAST (SNES, 1991)



BOW AND ARROW

Having a ranged attack is crucial to gameplay in all of the *Zelda* titles. Sometimes preceded by the Slingshot, the Bow and Arrow is often employs different types of arrows to accomplish specific goals. The types of arrows usually found are Fire, Ice, Silver, Bomb, and Light.

SWORDS

The sword is Link's primary weapon, but over the course of *Zelda* games, he wields quite a few different blades—such as the Biggoron Sword, The White Sword, and the Kokiri Sword. But a couple of swords always seem to pop up in *Zelda* games.

THE WOODEN SWORD | In the original game and a couple others, including *Twilight Princess*, Link begins the game with the weak Wooden Sword.

THE MASTER SWORD | Though it sometimes goes by different names, the Master Sword appears in the majority of *Zelda* games—and often in the games' logos.

HOOKSHOT / CLAWSHOT

The Hookshot is a crucial tool for Link, allowing him to take out enemies as well as travel to difficult-to-reach places. The Hookshot evolved into the Clawshot, which appears in *Twilight Princess* and also factors heavily in *Skyward Sword*.

The Hookshot is both a great stun weapon and a terrific way to journey to out-of-the-ways places. You can use it to injure or stun some low-level enemies or use it as the ultimate ninja tool. Flying to far-off wooden chests or wall anchors is just a well-placed shot away. —*Chris Holt*

[ALTERNATE TIMELINE]

LINK'S AWAKENING (GB, 1993)

LINK'S AWAKENING DX (GBC, 1998)

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA (NES, 1987)

ZELDA II: THE ADVENTURE OF LINK (NES, 1988)

THE WIND WAKER (GC, 2002)

PHANTOM HOURGLASS (DS, 2008)

SPIRIT TRACKS (DS, 2009)

ORACLE OF SEASONS (GBC, 2001)

ORACLE OF AGES (GBC, 2001)

WHAT WILL MAKE SKYWARD SWORD DIFFERENT?

As a part of the 25th anniversary of the *Zelda* series, Nintendo wanted to make sure fans had an appropriate way to celebrate: with games. The 3DS remake of *Ocarina of Time* was first out of the gate, but the big release is *Skyward Sword* for the Wii. What new things will we see in this latest (and greatest?) *The Legend of Zelda* adventure?

MORE MATURE

As you may have seen in trailers, both Link and Zelda have a decidedly older look to them, though one would hardly call them adults. More like old tweens.

MORE SWORDPLAY

The Wii MotionPlus peripheral is expected to get the workout we've always wanted for it, realistically mimicking your sword and shield movements.

MORE FLYING

Since some of the worlds you visit are floating islands, you do most of your travelling on the back of an enormous bird. Sorry, Epona.

THE BEETLE

One of Link's new toys is "The Beetle," and it's kind of like a remote-controlled robot that defuses traps and does other neat, beetley stuff.

MORE OPEN

Skyloft is a more open world for Link and less of a series of distinct dungeons. This allows for a more natural progression to Link's adventures and abilities.

THE FUTURE OF ZELDA

We know that a *Zelda* title is in the works for Nintendo's next home console, the Wii U. But what does the *GamePro* staff want and expect to see in this new adventure?

DON'T TRY TO BE REALISTIC. WIND WAKER IS THE PRETTIEST ZELDA GAME YET. I WANT TO SEE ANOTHER THAT LOOKS JUST AS TIMELESSLY STYLISH.
—Justin Haywald

THE WII U IS NINTENDO'S FIRST HD CONSOLE, AND WITH A FLAGSHIP SERIES LIKE ZELDA, THEY'RE GOING TO PULL OUT ALL OF THE STOPS. WII U IN HD MEANS THE NEW ZELDA WILL HAVE A VISUAL STYLE WE'VE NEVER SEEN BEFORE.
—Olivia Hubert

I'D LOVE TO SEE NEW WEAPONS AND GADGETS. I'M TIRED OF COLLECTING THE SAME THINGS OVER AND OVER.
—Jason Wilson

THE POSSIBILITIES OF HOW TO EXPLOIT THE NEW WII U CONTROLLER SEEM RICH, BUT I WOULD REALLY LIKE TO SEE IT USED FOR MORE THAN AN INVENTORY SCREEN. PERHAPS SOME AUGMENTED-REALITY MOON-SHOT ACTION?
—Tom Price

GIVE ME AN HD GEN-ERATION OF ZELDA THAT RETAINS THE FUN, FLIGHTY SPIRIT OF WIND WAKER, BUT MAKES IT LOOK AS SLICK AS THE E3 2011 TECH DEMO TEASER. AND THEN WE'LL TALK.
—Will Herring

WTF IS A MOBA?

WORDS BY **TOM CHICK**

A HANDY GUIDE TO THE HOTTEST NEW GENRE IN GAMING.

DOTA? LOL? HON? DEMI? ROI? SMNC? WOWO MOBA?

MOBA, or Multiplayer Online Battle Arena, is the name for a blossoming new genre of action/strategy/RPG/etc. that first gained a foothold as a game born out of a *Warcraft III* custom scenario. With this kind of a convoluted history, no wonder people are confused a bit about it. What really is the deal with all this MOBA/DOTA business?

CONTINUED ▶

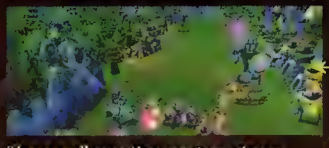
Image: *League of Legends*

MOBA BASICS

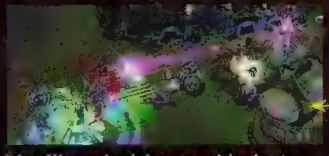
A few commonalities connect all MOBA-type games, no matter what kind of setting they employ, be it fantasy or sci-fi or something else. Here's a look at how they work:

THE TRADITIONAL MOBA MAP

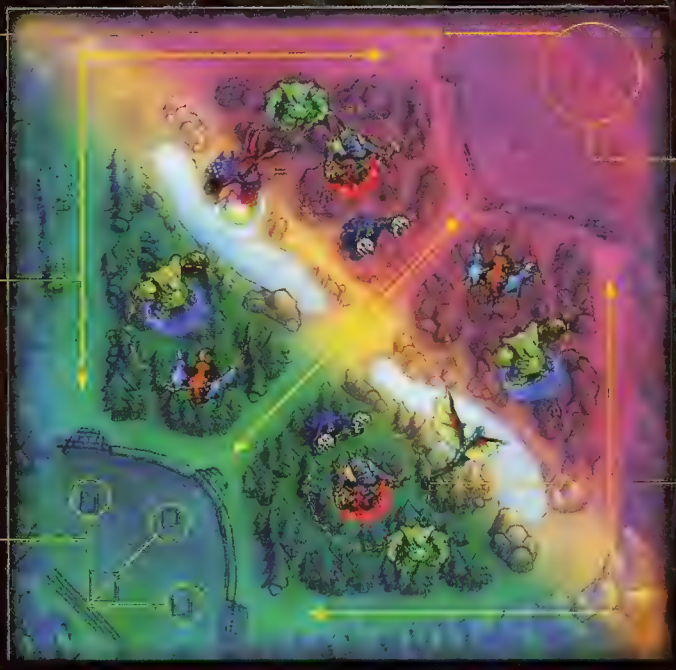
This is your base. You didn't even have to build it!

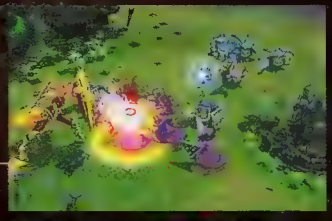


"Lanes" are the routes along which A.I. armies march. This is where most of the action is.

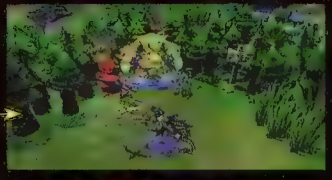


You'll probably need help to take out these defenses, so stick with your team.





Don't worry—you don't have to train all these Creep Minions or give them orders. They appear and march into battle automatically.



Out here is the "jungle." Approach with caution. You might find treasure, monsters, shortcuts, or enemy players.

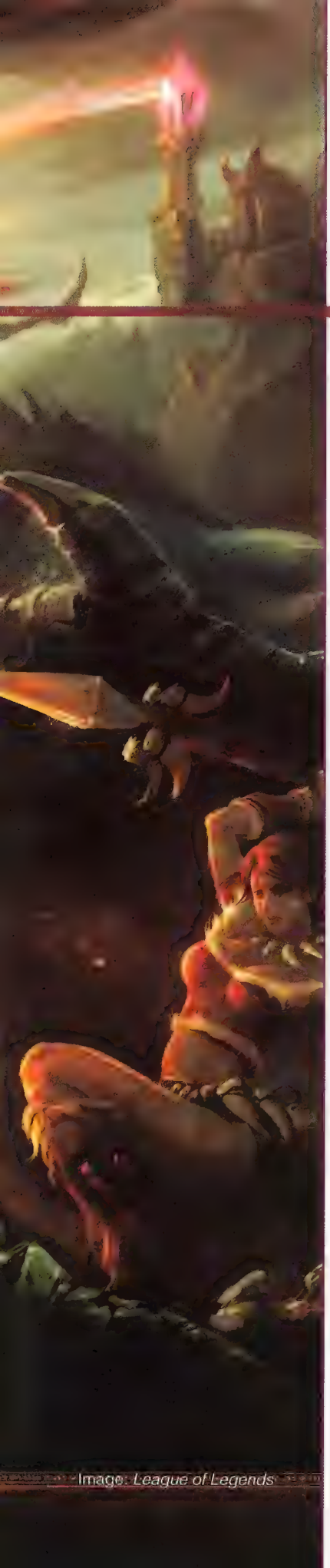


Image: *League of Legends*

A multiplayer online battle arena is kind of like a real-time strategy game, but it's streamlined so you only control one hero instead of an army. The army automatically streams out of your base, marching along a preset path to the enemy base, usually running afoul of defenses along the way. It's your team's job—these are almost always team games—to help these little guys trash the enemy base. And as you play a match, your hero levels up and earns new powers. All the action of an epic real-time strategy game but none of the hassle!

UNIQUE HEROES

Step one of any MOBA game begins with you choosing your character. While the heroes often fulfill some of the same basic RPG character types (tank, ranged unit, healer, etc.), you'll find a lot of variety in what these games have to offer, with some games like *League of Legends* and *Heroes of Newerth* giving you dozens of playable options.

TEAMWORK

After picking the character you most want to take into the Arena, Step Two is putting together a good team. With all those options for heroes with really specific abilities and powers, not to mention certain class-based special abilities and roles, finding the exact right chemistry between teammates is highly crucial.

CREEPS

It's not just about the heroes who are competing against each other in a MOBA. Creeps, or minions, are the little NPCs that you send out to attack the enemy base. Every chessboard needs its pawns, and the Creeps fill that function MOBAs. They have a lot in common with the typical hordes you see in a tower-defense game.

ADVANCEMENT

Your hero needs to improve, of course. Upgradeable weapons and armor, magic spells and upgrades to your skill set all help you do that, as if you were playing an RPG. In other words, you'll constantly need new stuff to deal with escalating battles, and upgrading gear and abilities is a key element of MOBA games.

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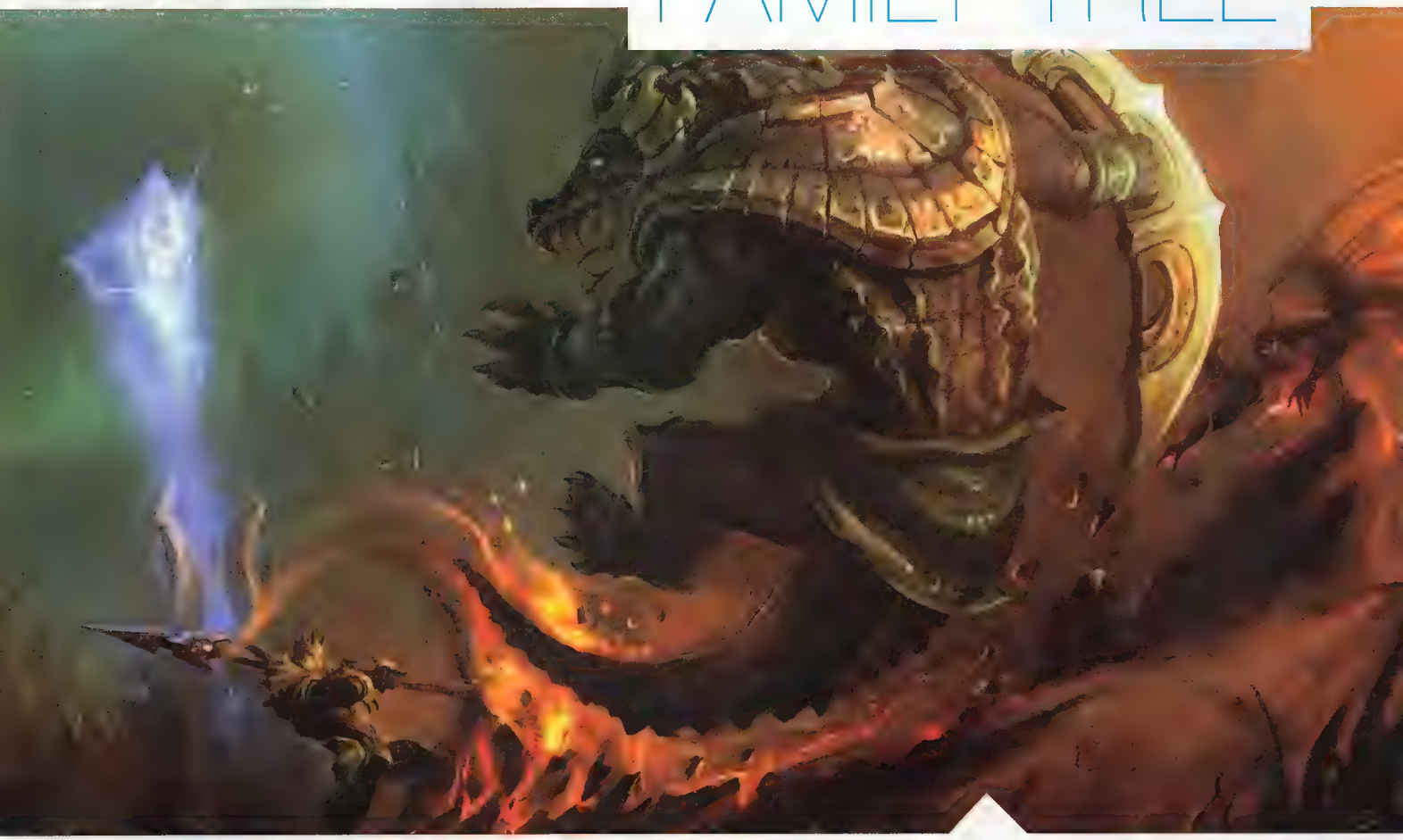
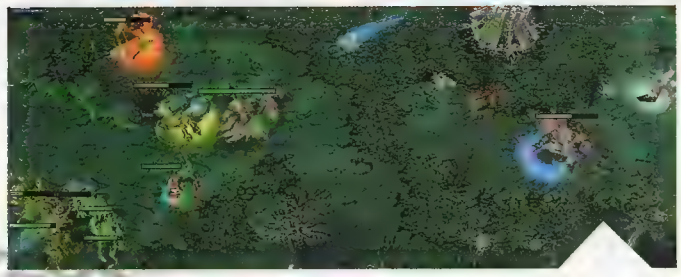
THE MOBA FAMILY TREE





THE VENERABLE PATRIARCH

Defense of the Ancients

The jury is still out whether the term MOBA—multiplayer online battle arena—will take. Until then, the *Warcraft III* mod that arguably started it all is also shorthand for the genre at large. Call them DOTA-alikes, DOTA clones, or even just DOTA games. The original is still going strong and available as "DOTA Allstars" at www.getdota.com. All you need is a copy of *Warcraft III*.

THE MOTHER OF ALL MOBAS

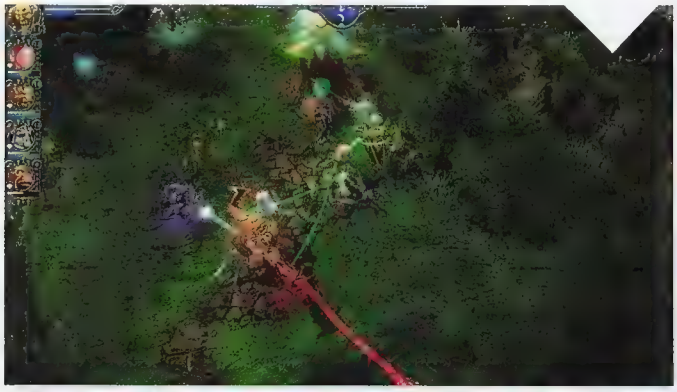
League of Legends

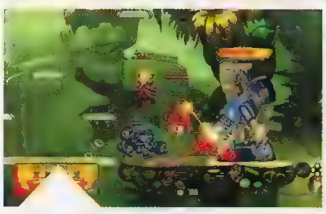
This multimillion dollar success story put MOBAs on the map. It also proved that free-to-play doesn't have to be a dirty word, bringing commercial success to the developers and creating goodwill among the player base. *League of Legends* offers an amazing amount of content before it ever nags you to spend a nickel. What's more, new content in the form of more heroes and new ways to play just keeps coming. With over 100 heroes, hearty co-op support, fiercely competitive player vs. player, and the new dominion mode, this is the MOBA game to beat.

THE OVERLOOKED BROTHER:

Heroes of Newerth

This game was developed and released roughly concurrent with *League of Legends*, but for a number of reasons, it could never get a break. Initially sold as a self-contained retail product, it failed to build the player base that *League of Legends* enjoyed. It also clung to some of the traditional mechanics of the original Defense of the Ancients that made it a less accessible to new players. But it's got a following, and as of last July, it uses the same risk-free free-to-play model that helped make *League of Legends* so successful.





THE SKINNY LITTLE SISTER

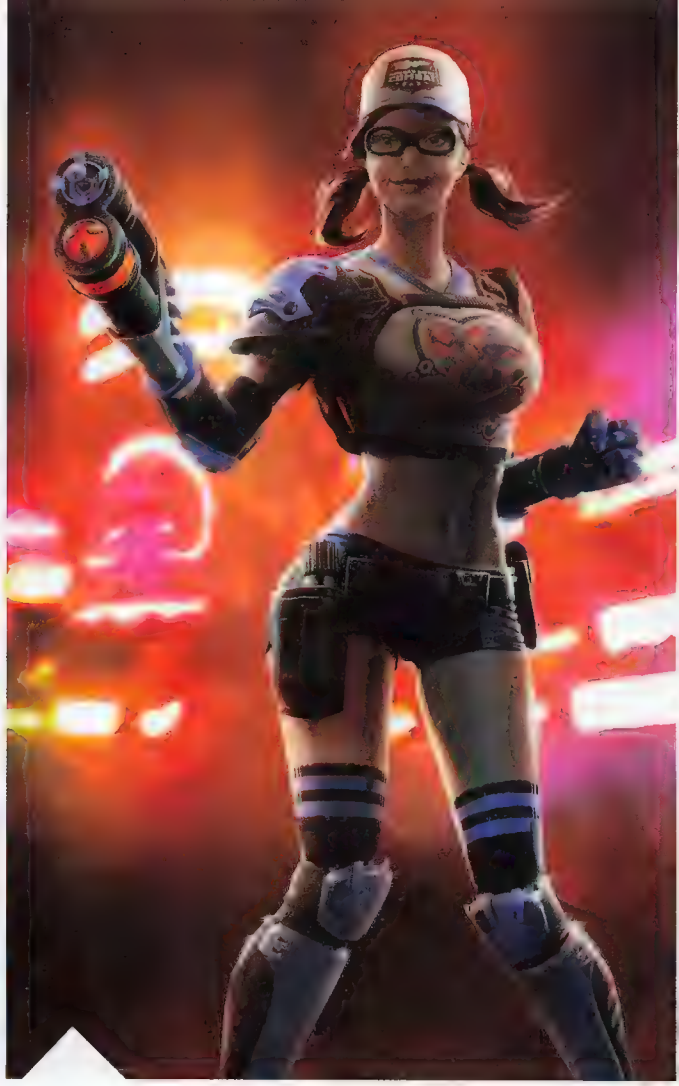
Awesomenauts

Speaking of not having to be a top-down strategy game, developer Geronimo is bringing to *Awesomenauts* the formula they used in *Swords and Soldiers*, an awesome little side-scrolling two-player RTS. The simpler controls make *Awesomenauts* one of the few MOBAs perfectly suited for a console system. It's also perfect for the impatient, with immediate drop-in and drop-out for multiplayer games. Waiting in lobbies? Not in *Awesomenauts*.

THE BLACK SHEEP

Rise of Immortals

Developer Petroglyph, founded by some of the folks responsible for the original *Command & Conquer* games, has been plugging away at real-time strategy for a long time, often with mixed results, but almost always with a unique twist. *Rise of the Immortals*, set in Petroglyph's Graxia fantasy world, hopes to hook players by focusing more on long-term character advancement.



THE CRAZY UNCLE

Super Monday Night Combat

Who says a MOBA has to be a top-down strategy game? *Monday Night Combat*, and it's upcoming free-to-play relaunch, *Super Monday Night Combat*, are shooters through and through. But they have all the trappings of a MOBA as players fight alongside and against columns of robots. With its colorful whimsy, the graphics might look like *Team Fortress*. But the gameplay is all DOTA.

THE SPACE CADET

Vorp

This arcade space-combat game isn't technically a MOBA, but it does have a mode called *Defense of the Armada* (get it?) in which each team has a capital ship launching waves of A.I. drone fighters at each other's defensive turrets. Get in there with your upgradeable ship and do what you can to destroy the other team's capital ship. Because if there's one thing video games have taught us, it's that if there's anything worth doing, it's also worth doing in space.

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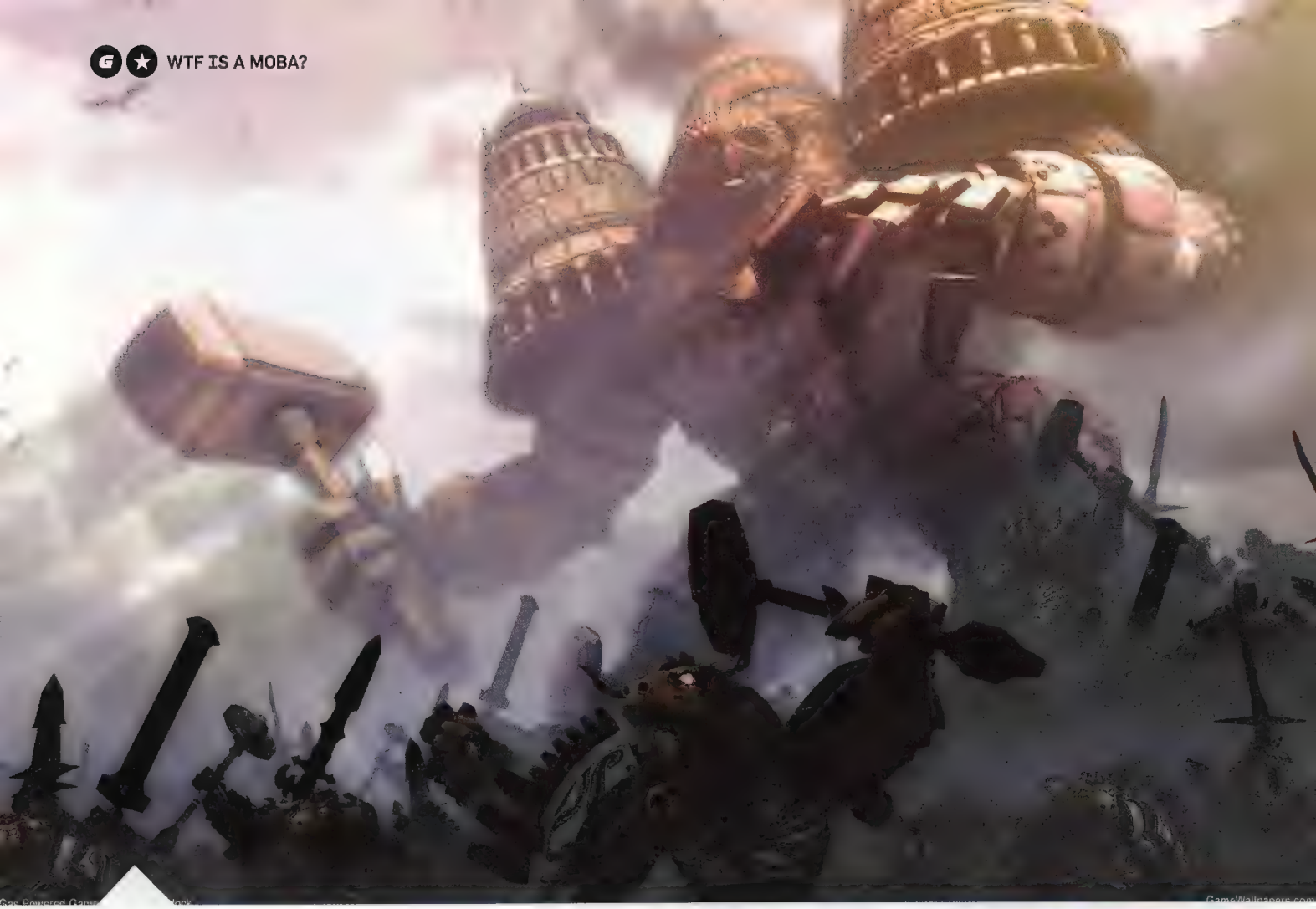
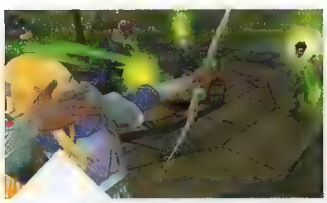


THE FORGOTTEN COUSIN

Demigod

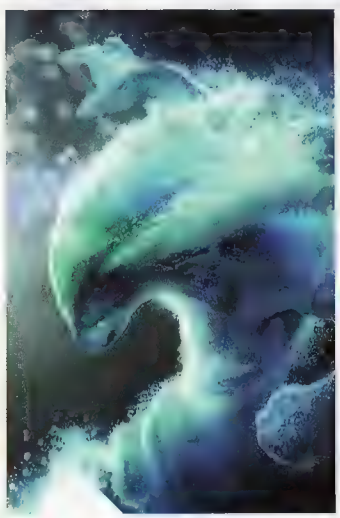
Gas Powered Games' RTS might have been before its time. It's routinely passed over when people talk about MOBAs, yet it's one of the most polished, gorgeous, and imaginative games in the category, with memorable heroes, clever maps, and easy-to-learn gameplay. And you can probably get a copy for cheap.

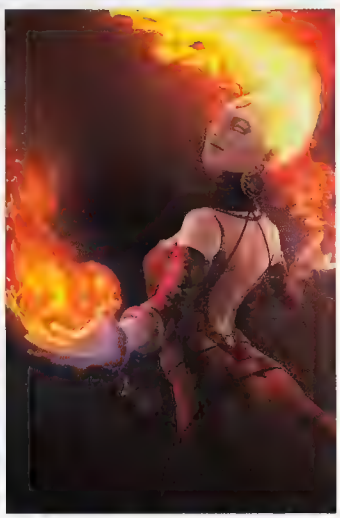


THE DARK HORSE

Warhammer Online: Wrath of Heroes

Can a major publisher shoehorn its way into a genre characterized by can-do indie spirit? Electronic Arts aims to find out, and it's bringing the *Warhammer* fantasy license for leverage. This free-to-play game has a distinct look but mostly familiar gameplay. The most notable twist, and a trademark of the *Warhammer Online* MMO, is three teams fighting each other at once. By our count, *Warhammer Online: Wrath of Heroes*' 6v6v6 is nearly twice as crazy as other games' 5v5.





THE PRODIGAL SON

Dota 2

Valve's contribution to the genre is being developed under the guidance of one of the creators of the original *Defense of the Ancients*. The twist? Well, the twist is...that there isn't any twist. On paper, *Dota 2* doesn't sound like much that you don't already have in, say, *League of Legends*. But as anyone who's played *Team Fortress 2* knows, Valve's games are more than the sum of their bullet points.

Halo: Combat Evolved Anniversary is a spectacular remastering of the very first Halo game's battle between the Master Chief and the alien Covenant. Breathtaking new graphics and 100% faithful gameplay deliver all the adventure of the original, along with a huge list of upgrades and new features.

XBOX.COM/HALO

MATURE 17+
M
Blood and Gore
Violence
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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XBOX LIVE Microsoft Studios 343 INDUSTRIES

XBOX 360

Jump in.

The 50 Best FIGHTING GAME CHARACTERS ever

We love to create lists based on our very learned, thought-out, authoritative, and completely subjective opinions. And considering the deep love of fighting games in the bosoms of *GamePro*'s editors, nothing could possibly please us more than to hash out our list of our favorite 50 fighting-game characters. You will undoubtedly disagree—

"WHAT, NO [INSERT FAVORITE CHARACTER HERE]?"

"HOW DARE THEY?"

"MY FAVORITE CHARACTER ISN'T NO. 1? WORST. LIST. EVER."

—but if you want to fight over it, we're sure we could think of a few ways to settle it...

(HINT: BRING YOUR FIGHT STICK.)

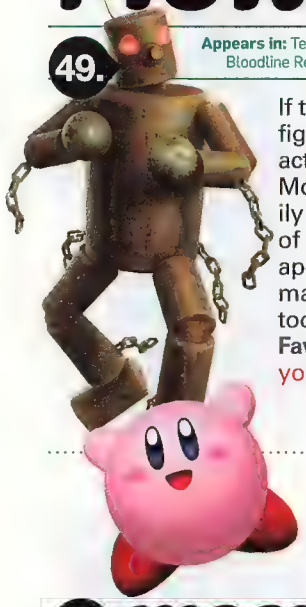
GAMEPRO'S DEFINITIVE LIST WILL PUT YOU IN A FIGHTING MOOD.

50 BLANKA

Appears in: Street Fighter II/II Dash/II Dash Turbo/Alpha 3/EX2/IV; Street Fighter: The Movie (the game); Capcom vs. SNK/2

Blanka was once human, but after being raised in the Brazilian rainforest, he's turned a bit more feral. Strangely, he's become a real-life folk hero in Brazil. —*Tom Price*
Favorite Move: Electric Thunder : MASH P

49. MOKUJIN



Appears in: Tekken 3/5/5: Dark Resurrection/6/6: Bloodline Rebellion; Tekken Tag Tournament/2

If this list was just for fighting-game characters made of wood, Mokujin would easily be No. 1...on a list of one. His ability to ape any player's style makes him awesome, too. —*Tom Price*
Favorite Move: Take your pick

48 MITSURUGI

Appears in: The Soul Edge/Soulcalibur series

While it's easy to write off Mitsrugi because of his stereotypical ronin look, the character's ferocious attacks, taciturn manner, and moral ambiguity have endeared him to fans. — *Chris Holt*
Favorite Move: Heavenly Dance: ↘+B B OR ↗+B B

THE FULL LOWDOWN

GAMES REPRESENTED:
STREET FIGHTER SERIES = 10
MORTAL KOMBAT SERIES = 6
SOULCALIBUR SERIES = 6
TEKKEN SERIES= 5
DARKSTALKERS SERIES = 3
GUILTY GEAR SERIES = 3
SUPER SMASH BROS. = 3
MARVEL VS. CAPCOM SERIES = 2
BARBARIAN = 1
BLAZBLUE = 1
BUSHIDO BLADE = 1
DOA SERIES = 1
FIGHTERS MEGA MIX = 1
KARATE CHAMP = 1
POWER STONE = 1
THRILL KILL = 1
TIME KILLERS = 1
VIRTUA FIGHTER SERIES = 1
WU-TANG SHAO-LIN STYLE = 1

WITH WEAPON: 30%

WITHOUT WEAPON: 70%

WHO OR WHAT ARE THEY?:
♂ MALE = 27 ♀ FEMALE = 12
⚥ MALE/FEMALE MIX = 1
ANIMAL/HUMAN HYBRID = 2
DINOSAUR = 1 DOG = 1
MEAT = 1 INK BLOB = 1
MEXICAN GREEN BEAN = 1
POKÉMON = 1 ROBOT = 1
WOODEN DUMMY = 1

47 KIRBY

Appears in: Super Smash Bros., Super Smash Bros. Melee, Super Smash Bros. Brawl

Masahiro Sakurai's goofy, gluttonous Star Warrior is no stranger to scrapping with Nintendo's best.
—*Will Herring*
Favorite move: Final Cutter: ↑ B

46 Q

Appears in: Street Fighter III: Third Strike

Whose side is this gangly, trenchcoat-clad combatant on, anyway? Is he even human? A robot? Or...something else entirely? — *Will Herring*
Favorite move: Dashing Head Attack: ←→P

45 Lei Wulong

Appears in: Tekken 2/3/4/5/5: Dark Resurrection/6/6: Bloodline Rebellion; Tekken Tag Tournament/2

The Hong Kong supercop is clearly based on Jackie Chan, but with less hilarity. Well, his "Drunken Master" style is pretty dang hilarious. —*Tom Price*
Favorite Move: Drunken Master: → LK+RK

THE SENIOR CIRCUIT

THE TOP 5 ELDERLY FIGHTERS WHO KICK WHIPPERSNAPPING ASS

AGE: 65

But can still pull off Punk Mohawk.

No. 5: Gen Fu
Dead or Alive's 65-year-old Gen Fu once owned a small bookstore, which is ironic, because his fighting reminds us of Hemingway's *The Old Man and the*...knee to the face!

AGE: 76

But can still pull off Manstache.

No. 4: Heihachi Mishima
Appearing in every *Tekken* game to date, Heihachi's one of gaming's geriatric greats for having a fighting style named after him—and for his awesome spiky alternative to the comb-over.

AGE: 96

But can still pull off Bikini Bottoms

No. 3: Otane Goketsuji
Power Instinct's Otane Goketsuji makes our list of outstanding old people for one reason: Instead of firing a boring fireball, her special move is spitting her dentures out at opponents.

AGE: 99

But can still pull off Mall Santa Beard

No. 2: Shun Di
Virtua Fighter's Chinese kung-fu master may look 102 years old, but Shun Di is a savage in the ring whose secret to kicking ass is getting wasted (on wine?) before every fight.

AGE: 500

But can still pull off Universal Domination

No. 1: Shang Tsung
Mortal Kombat's shape-shifting sorcerer is living proof that age really is "just a number," considering he's over 500 years old. But why doesn't he turn into someone less goddamn ugly?

44 MEAT

Appears in: Mortal Kombat 4, MK: Gold, MK: Deception, MK: Armageddon, Mortal Kombat (2011).

Mortal Kombat's fleshless fiend, Meat, is exactly what its name suggests: a man-shaped being made up of glistening sinew and human meat. Yum. — *Patrick Shaw*
Favorite Move: Head Roll: ↘1

43 Marth

Appears in: Super Smash Bros. Melee, Super Smash Bros. Brawl, Fire Emblem

He's the *bishounen* swordsman who single-handedly got *Fire Emblem* localized in the States. He's beloved by anime fans everywhere. — *Kat Bailey*
Favorite Move: Charge Smash: HOLD B RELEASE

WOLVERINE

Appears in: X-Men: Children of the Atom; Marvel Super Heroes; X-Men vs. Street Fighter; Marvel Super Heroes vs. Street Fighter; Marvel vs. Capcom/2/3; Marvel Nemesis: Rise of the Imperfects.

42

When it comes to brutal supercombos and unhinged, grizzly bear–like aggression, Wolverine beats the other fighters on this list at the very first snarl. — *McKinley Noble*
Favorite Move: Berserker Barrage: ↓↘→PP

BANG Shishigami

41

Appears in: BlazBlue: Calamity Trigger, BlazBlue: Continuum Shift, BlazBlue: Continuum Shift II

Bang is a zany, overzealous ninja and a self-proclaimed "hero of love and justice." He's also the very essence of manliness distilled into its absolute purest form. — *Will Herring*
Favorite move: Fu-Rin-Ka-Zan: ↓↘→↓↘→Ⓓ

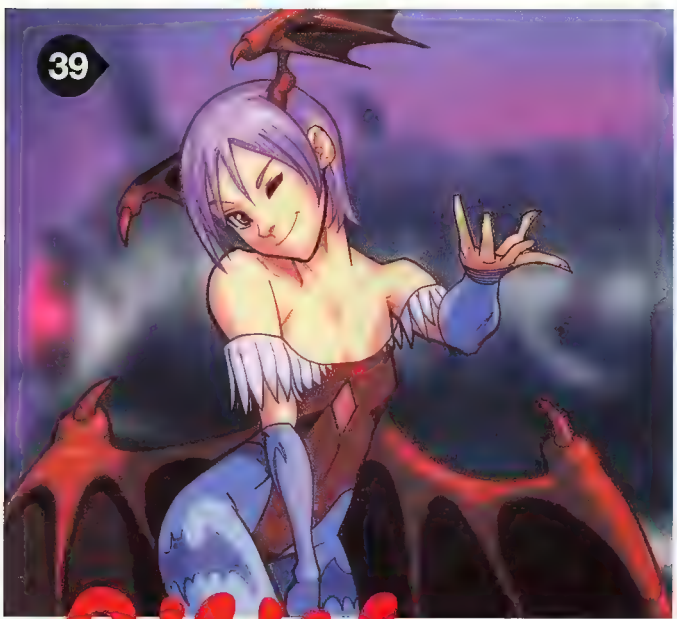
SUB ZERO

40

Appears in: Every Mortal Kombat game

Sub-Zero is the name of two ninja-style bothers. The elder appears in the first *Mortal Kombat*, but his younger sibling replaced him and appears every subsequent game in this series. —*Jaz Rignall* **Favorite Move:** Ice Blast: ↓↘Ⓟ

39



Lilith

Appears in: Darkstalkers 3; Darkstalkers Chronicle.

When you want to embarrass your opponent, Lilith and her whole "Lolita sex appeal thing" is just as fun to exploit as Morrigan's cheap combos. — *McKinley Noble*
Favorite Move: Soul Flash: ↓↙→Ⓟ

RANCID

38

Appears in: Time Killers

Born in a dumpster in "New Chicago" in the distant future (actually, 2024), punk rock psycho Rancid has a gnarly chain saw and an even gnarlier "X" scar on his forehead. —*Patrick Shaw* **Favorite Move:** Chainsaw Lobotomy: IN AIR Ⓟ + ARM WEAPON

GON

37

Appears in: Tekken 3

Gon, the famous dinosaur from the Japanese comic of the same name, is both the cheapest and most dangerous character in *Tekken 3*. He's about the size of a soccer ball, so you can't throw him, and good luck trying to combo the diminutive reptile. Prepare to get your ankles bitten, clawed, or torched off. — *McKinley Noble*
Favorite Move: Dino Fart: ←→Ⓚ

36 DEKU

Appears in: Fighters MegaMix

An anthropomorphic Mexican jumping bean clad in a sweet sombrero, this quirky combatant single-handedly justifies Sega's crossover brawler. —*Will Herring* **Favorite move:** Deku's Destroyer: down, forward + kick

35 Sarah BRYANT

Appears in: Virtua Fighter/2/3/4/5 & Fighters Megamix.

Sarah Bryant has been *Virtua Fighter*'s blonde bombshell ever since she was just a mess of squares and triangles in 1993. Her blue, skintight bodysuit never gets old. —*McKinley Noble* **Favorite Move:** Dash Knee: ➡➡K

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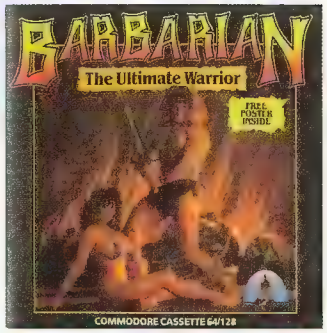
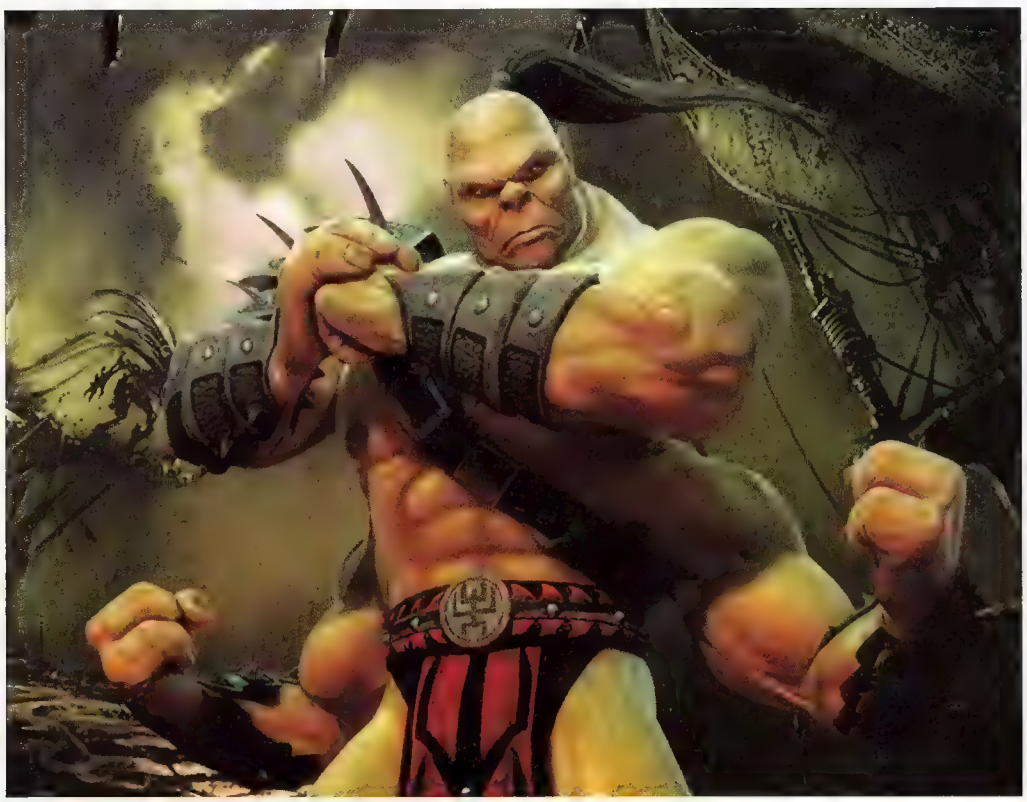


BARBARIAN

Appears in: Barbarian: The Ultimate Warrior, Barbarian II

Barbarian is the star of this ancient 1987 Commodore 64 fighting game and is famous for his sword-whirling special move that can decapitate opponents in spectacular, blood-spurting fashion. Similarly spectacular (and real) is box-art star Maria Whitaker, a "Page Three" model better known for her regular topless appearances in Britain's *The Sun* tabloid newspaper. —*Jaz Rignall* **Favorite Move:** Flying Neck Chop: HOLD FIRE➡



33. GORO

Appears in: Mortal Kombat, MK Trilogy, MK4, MK: Deception, MK: Shaolin Monks, MK: Unchained, MK: Armageddon, Mortal Kombat (2011).

Mortal Kombat's four-armed aggressor might not be the brightest beast in all of Netherrealm, but who else can choke someone out while scratching their butt and munching on a turkey leg? —*Patrick Shaw* **Favorite Move:** Leaping Stomp: ⬇⬅⬅K.

32

BRIDGET

Appears in: Guilty Gear XX

He's the most famous crossdresser in the history of gaming. And as it turns out, his yo-yo makes for a pretty sweet weapon, too. —*Kat Bailey*

FAVORITE MOVE: LOOP-THE-LOOP:

MARSHALL LAW

31

Appears in: Tekken, Tekken III-VI, Tekken Tag 1-2

You won't find a better Bruce Lee clone out there than *Tekken*'s Marshall Law. With exceptionally fast punches and a slew of flip-kicks, don't count this chef-turned-fighter out from any fight. —*Chris Holt*

Favorite move: Run Up to Drop: F+2+3

ROUGE

Appears in: Power Stone & Power Stone 2.

Power Stone's resident fortune-teller has always been the most unique (and beautiful) fighter in the bunch. She floats like a butterfly and stings like a flamethrower. —*McKinley Noble*

Favorite Move: Secret Heaven: JUMP+P

30

29

Xianghua

Appears in: Soulcalibur/II/III/IV; Soulcalibur: Broken Destiny.

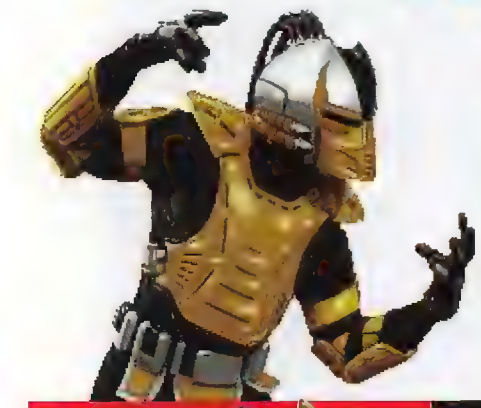
Xianghua brings a little House of Flying Daggers to the *Soulcalibur* series and looks insanely cool doing it thanks to rapid-fire striking and incredibly speedy footwork. —*McKinley Noble*

Favorite Move: Raging Wind: A+G

28 KING

Appears in: Tekken, Tekken 2, Tekken 3, Tekken 4, Tekken 5, Tekken 5: Dark Resurrection, Tekken 6, Tekken 6: Bloodline Rebellion.

This Jaguar-masked Mexican minister/wrestler is a master at breaking bones. He's based on Fray Tormenta, the preacher-turned-luchador who inspired *Nacho Libre,* too. —*Patrick Shaw* **Favorite Move:** Rolling Death Cradle: LP+LK LK+RK RP+RK LP+RP LP+RP+LK



26 CYRAX

Appears in: Mortal Kombat 3, Ultimate MK3, MK Trilogy, MK Gold, MK Advance, MK: Deadly Alliance, MK: Tournament Edition, MK: Deception, MK: Armageddon, Mortal Kombat (2011).

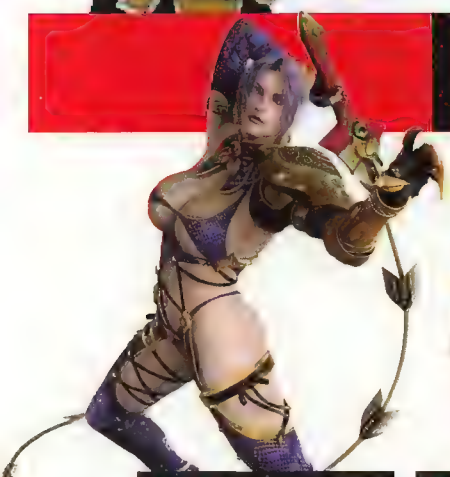
It's tough picking favorites among *Mortal Kombat*'s duo of cyborg ninjas with dreadlocks: Sektor and Cyrax. But we like Cyrax a bit more because he's yellow. — *Patrick Shaw* **Favorite Move:** Energy Net: ←←→ K

27 RED SHADOW

Appears in: Bushido Blade, Bushido Blade II

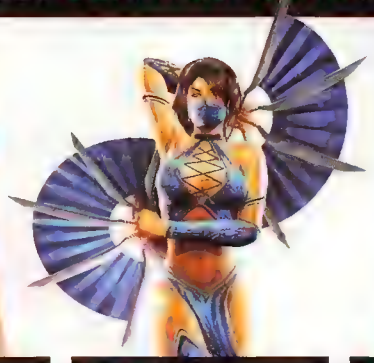
This speedy shinobi hails from Russia and is the fastest fighter in Square's feudal franchise. —*Will Herring* **Favorite move:** Middle Stance Slash: M M L

SHOWING SOME A LOT OF SKIN
TOP 5 MOST SCANTILY CLAD FIGHTERS

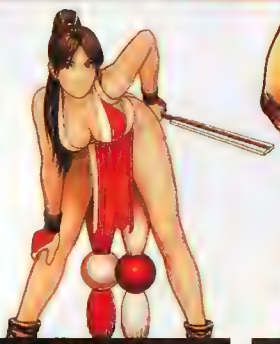


No. 5: Ivy
One of our favorite gaming MILFs, *Soulcalibur*'s Ivy is in constant danger of a wardrobe malfunction. How she keeps those bodacious baby feeders covered while kicking someone's butt defies all explanation.

No. 4: Tina Armstrong
Just picking one of the lovely ladies of *Dead or Alive* for "most scantily clad" is a challenge unto itself. But outside of the *DOA Volleyball* game, most of the ladies are pretty covered up.



No. 3: Kitana
The outfits of *Mortal Kombat*'s Kitana don't leave much to the imagination. But that part covering up her face is there for a reason—she's got one scary-looking grill under there. Talk about the ultimate butter-face.



No. 2: Mai Shiranui
Again, we wonder about the practicality of outfits like the one sported by *King of Fighters*' Mai Shiranui. We're guessing it involves lots and lots of tape. It may look hot, but it's not exactly sensible, right?

No. 1: E. Honda
Street Fighter's resident sumo wrestler is wearing nothing but a towel, which you may consider an upgrade from the diapers (sorry, *mawashi*). If that doesn't scream "stranger danger," then nothing else does.

25 Sophitia

Appears In: Soul Edge; Soulcalibur/II/III/IV; Soulcalibur Legends; Soulcalibur: Broken Destiny.

About the only thing more interesting than Sophitia and her incredibly solid sword-play is how she manages to stay contained in her *Soul-calibur IV* "armor." —*McKinley Noble* **Favorite Move:** Holy Cracker: B+G ↓+A

24 PIKACHU

Appears In: Super Smash Bros. Series

It's famous for the Thunder attack, the game's most annoying move, and is even more famous for its pathetic "Pika, Pika!" after you uppercut it to hell. —*Kat Bailey* **Favorite Move:** Thunder: ↓+B

23 SCORPION

Appears In: Mortal Kombat/II/4/Gold/Unchained/Deadly Alliance/Armageddon Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe; Mortal Kombat (2011); Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3.

This demonic palette swap of Sub-Zero is better known for his "Get over here!" catchphrase than his convoluted backstory. But then, who plays *MK* for the story? You want to impale people, light them on fire, and then rip them apart—and this is Scorpion's specialty. —*Justin Haywald* **Favorite Move:** Spear: ←←→P

22 GUILE

Appears In: Street Fighter II/Alpha 3/EX/EX2/EX3/IV; Marvel vs. Capcom 2; Capcom vs. SNK/2; Capcom Fighting Jam; SNK vs. Capcom: Match of the Millennium/ SVC Chaos/Card Fighters Clash.

Guile is a cultural artifact of the early '90s: a gung ho, All-American soldier with a haircut you can set your watch to. He's a gaijin superhero. —*Tom Price* **Favorite move:** Sonic Boom: CHARGE ←→P

21 R. MIKA

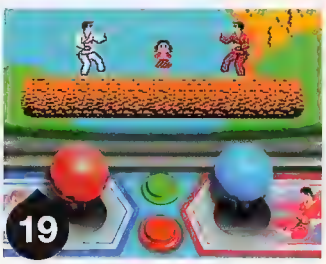
Appears in: Street Fighter Alpha 3.

Rainbow Mika's ruffles, heart-emblazoned outfits, and butt-first thrust attacks are all vintage women's Japanese wrestling. It's just too bad she's only gotten one game to strut her stuff. *—McKinley Noble*
Favorite Move: Shooting Peach: ↓↘→K

20 THE RZA

Appears in: Wu-Tang Shaolin Style

Packing a razor-sharp flow as deadly as his dual blades, this soldier from the slums of Shaolin helped bridge the gap between the hip-hop and gaming worlds. *—Will Herring* **Favorite move:** Wu-Tang Swords: ←↓→P



19 RED GUY

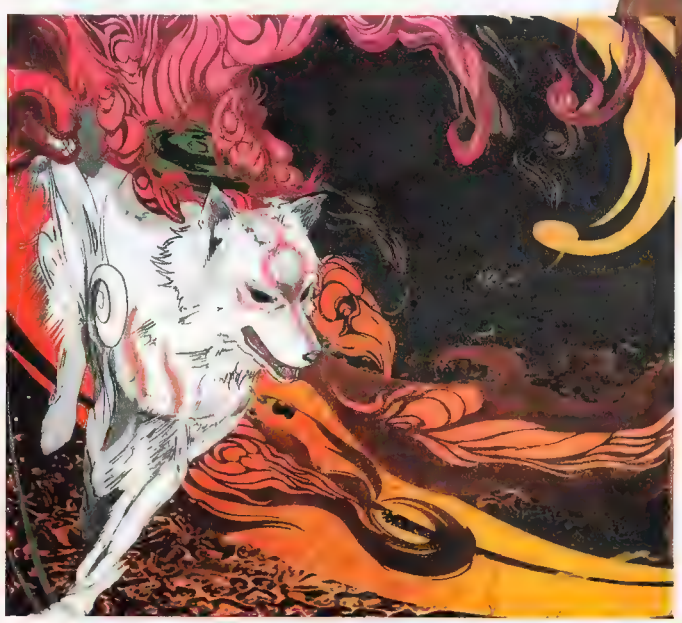
Appears in: Karate Champ

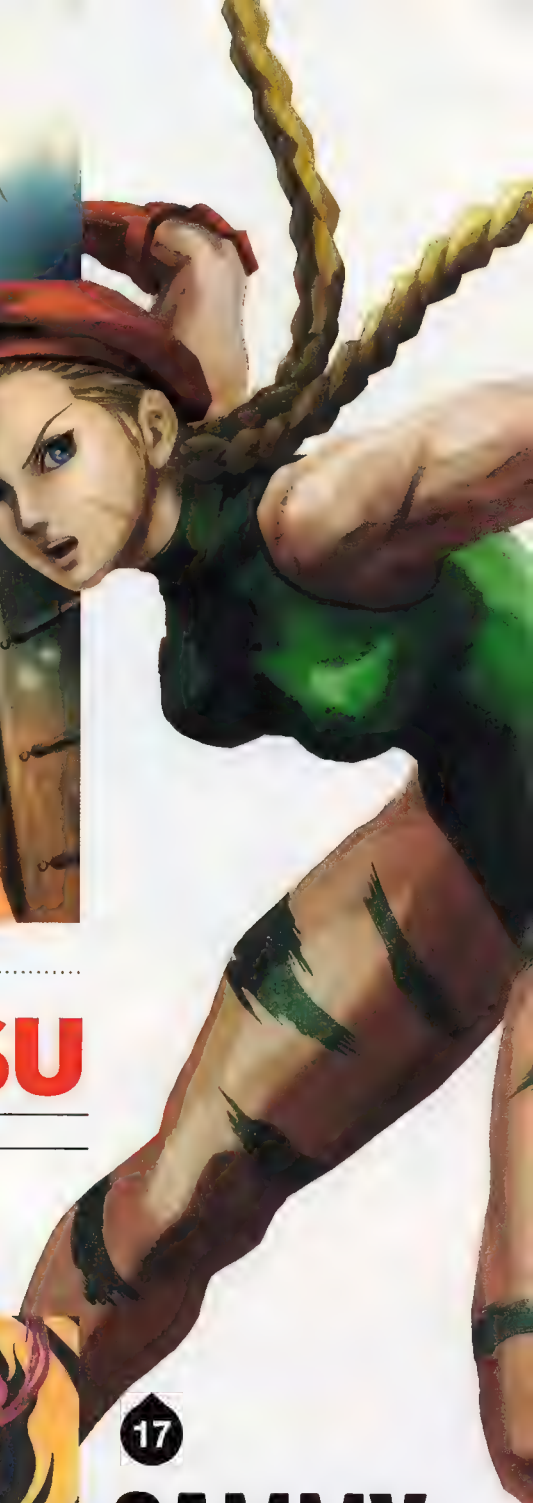
It's hard to pick one over the other, but these two guys practically invented the genre. OK, maybe we like the red one a little better. *—Tom Price*
Favorite Move: Back round kick: LEFT STICK → RIGHT STICK ←

18. AMATERASU

Appears in: Marvel vs. Capcom 3

Amaterasu wields a sword and the god-like power of a celestial brush. When she needs to go to the bathroom, you better damn well let her out. *—Justin Haywald*
Favorite Move: Power Slash: ↓↘→P





17 CAMMY

Appears in: Street Fighter II/Alpha 2 Gold/Alpha 3/IV; X-Men vs. Street Fighter; Marvel vs. Capcom 2; Capcom vs. SNK/2; Street Fighter X Tekken.

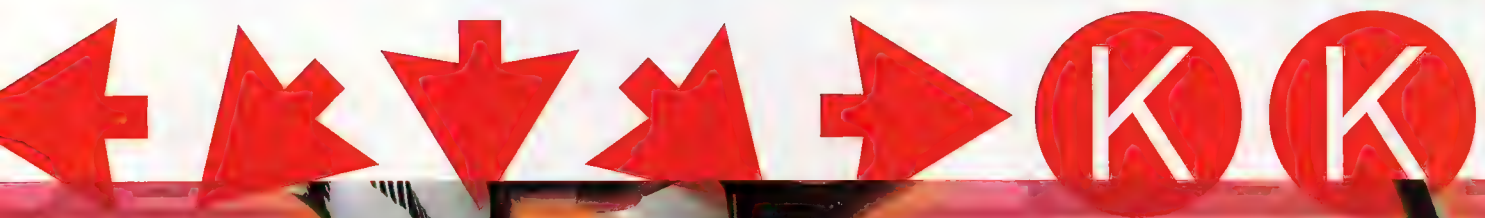
Cammy may be a blonde beauty, but her pro-wrestling style slams and throws are mean stuff. Consider her the G.I. Jane of the *Street Fighter* crew. *—McKinley Noble* **Favorite Move:** Cannon Spike: ↓↙←P

16 FELICIA

Appears in: Darkstalkers; Night Warriors: Darkstalkers' Revenge; Darkstalkers 3; Vampire Savior/Hunter 2; Darkstalkers Chronicle/The Chaos Tower; Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo; Super Gem Fighter Mini Mix; Marvel vs. Capcom 2/3; SNK vs. Capcom: Match of the Millennium; Capcom Fighting Evolution.

Deep down, Felicia is pretty much every nerd boy's dream girl (or fantasy house pet). For one, she's practically naked, save for strategically placed bits of fur, no matter what game she shows up in. And since she's also an actual half-cat, half-human, Felicia technically doesn't qualify as a furry.
—McKinley Noble

FAVORITE MOVE: PLEASE HELP ME!:



15

I-No

Appears in: The Guilty Gear series

Channeling Van Halen and Sabrina the Teenage Witch at the same time, I-No's blending of rock music and supernatural weaponry made her a perfect fit for the *Guilty Gear* roster. *—Chris Holt*

Favorite move: Last Will And Testament: ↓↙←↓↙←HS

13

M. BISON

Appears in: Street Fighter II CE/Alpha/Alpha 2/Alpha 3/II Turbo/IV/EX/EX2/EX3; Street Fighter: The Movie (the game); Capcom Fighting Jam; X-Men vs. Street Fighter; Marvel Super Heroes vs. Street Fighter; Marvel vs. Capcom2: New Age of Heroes; SNK vs. Capcom series; Namco x Capcom

This overpowered endboss might be a little unfair in some *SF* games, but this is exactly why he's awesome. Who wants to lose? *—Justin Haywald*

Favorite Move: Psycho Crusher: ←→P

14

THE IMP

Appears in: Thrill Kill

What's not to love about a hairless, thong-sporting midget on stilts? Sure, The Imp is small in stature, but he's definitely capable of breaking one of his stilts off in your ass. *—Patrick Shaw* **Favorite Move:** Shrinkage: SP BK→

12

LIU KANG

Appears in: Mortal Kombat/II/3/Trilogy/4/Gold/Advance/Deception/Unchained/ Armageddon/Shaolin Monks; Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe; Ultimate Mortal Kombat/3; Mortal Kombat (2011)

This Bruce Lee body double can bicycle kick you from across the screen and still never lose that glossy, bare-chest sheen. *—Justin Haywald*

Favorite Move: The Beast Within Fatality: ↓↓→↓BK FROM JUMP DISTANCE

11. Siegfried

Appears in: Soul Edge/Blade; Soulcalibur/II/III/IV/V/Broken Destiny

Nightmare or Siegfried? Both have massive swords and sweet armor, but only one has blonde hair and a tragic past. —*Kat Bailey*
Favorite Move: Uppercut Slice: B B B

10. LINK

Appears in: Super Smash Bros, Super Smash Bros. Melee, Super Smash Bros. Brawl.

He's never been a strong fighter, but he's always a favorite at parties. Many a fight has been started over who gets "Blue Link." For best results, throw bombs. —*Kat Bailey*
Favorite Move: Whirlwind Attack: ▲+B

09. Chipp ZANUFF

Appears in: the Guilty Gear series

Never considered a top-tier character because of his lack of health, the Japanese-wannabe Chipp has one thing going for him: speed. With a blade on his hand, he's part ninja, part Speedy-Gonzalez. —*Chris Holt*
Favorite Move: TK: ▼◣◀▶P

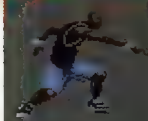
08 VOLDO

Appears in: Soul Edge, Soulcalibur Legends, Soulcalibur I-V

This S&M inspired weirdo may be the biggest freak to ever adorn a video game. Blind, insane, and incredibly strange, Voldo is easily the most original character in fighting games. —*Tom Price*
Favorite Move: Mantis Crawl: ▼+Y+B

OH GOD, NO.

THE 5 WORST FIGHTING GAME CHARACTERS OF ALL TIME



Shaq—Shaq-Fu
His accomplishments on the court can't be questioned (at least, not by us), but his contributions to pop culture are a bit more suspect. *Kazaam*, "Kobe, tell me how my a** tastes," and, worst of all, *Shaq-Fu* are a testament as to why he should go be a TV analyst or something.

Hornet—Fighters Megamix
When creating these compilation fighting titles, the urge to include "characters" from every possible licensed property is something that should be fought. Unfortunately, someone thought they needed a character from Sega's *Daytona USA* racing game. Hence, we get a car that fights. Not even a transforming anthropomorphic car. Just a car that somehow stands on its wheels. Dumb.

Angus—Kasumi Ninja
You'd think that a Scotsman that lifts his kilt and launches a fireball from his assumably unclothed nether regions would be a cool thing, but you would be terribly, terribly wrong.

Yun—Street Fighter
The "Poochie" of video-game characters, his ball cap and skateboard just scream manufactured "'tude". As a fighter, his move list isn't bad, but his overall design just seems like foolish pandering to kids by clueless marketing executives.

Fred Durst—Fight Club
Because the only thing that sucks worse than this terrible attempt to cash in on a popular movie is that Fred Durst is an unlockable character. Not that we mind the idea of beating up on Fred Durst.

07 RYU

Appears in: Every Street Fighter ever (seriously), Marvel vs. Capcom, SNK vs. Capcom, Namco x Capcom.

He's the most balanced fighter in the *SF* pantheon; since he's in every *SF* game, novices like me can always pull off at least a couple special moves. *—Justin Haywald*

Favorite Move: Hadouken : ↓↘→P

05 KEN

Appears in: Every Street Fighter ever (seriously), Marvel vs. Capcom, SNK vs. Capcom, Namco x Capcom.

Once a mirror of Ryu, Ken has since developed his own arsenal. His Flaming Shoyruken is always a crowd favorite. See also: Flow-charting. *—Kat Bailey* **Favorite Move:** Flaming Shoryuken: →↘→P

06 MORRIGAN

Appears in: Darkstalkers series, Marvel Vs. Capcom series, SNK Vs. Capcom series,

The succubus Morrigan combines sensuality with deadly intent. Armed with transformative wings that can change into bats, spikes, and a slew of other weaponry, she's easily the most identifiable *Darkstalkers* character. *—Chris Holt*

Favorite move: Soul Erasure: ↓↘→PP

04 DHALSIM

Appeared In: Street Fighter II: The World Warrior, Street Fighter II: Turbo, Street Fighter Alpha 2/3, Street Fighter EX/EX3, Street Fighter IV, X-Men vs. Street Fighter, Marvel Super Heroes vs. Street Fighter, Marvel vs. Capcom 2, Capcom vs. SNK, Capcom vs. SNK 2 and SNK vs. Capcom: SVC Chaos.

A yoga mystic from India, Dhalsim is renown for his crazy, limb-stretching kicks and punches and slow-moving Yoga Flame fireball, which make him a formidable opponent at range. His combat style is almost unique in fighting games, and it's difficult to master. But experts can exploit his moves to make them incredibly hard to beat. *—Jaz Rignall*

Favorite Move: Yoga Teleport: →↘→ P+P+P OR K+K+K

03

Kasumi

Appears in: Dead or Alive, DOA2, DOA3, DOA: Xtreme Beach Volleyball, DOA Ultimate, DOA4, DOA Xtreme 2, Girls of DOA BlackJack, DOA Paradise, DOA: Dimensions.

Dead or Alive's redheaded runaway ninja is arguably the most beloved fighter in the entire series. But don't get too attached: The game says she's only 17. And while young, Kasumi's absolutely vicious with her wakizashi sword. Fun Facts: Her hobbies include fortune-telling, and her favorite color is "milky pink." Er...what? —*Patrick Shaw*

Favorite Move: Tenbu: IN AIR B

KILIK

02

Appears in: Soulcalibur/II/III/IV/Broken Destiny

Some people think Kilik is cheap or easy. Maybe that's why almost everyone on *GamePro*'s staff had him on their list. Like Napolean Dynamite, he's pretty good with his Bo Staff, perhaps because he was raised by some insane monks. Kilik's long-range attacks and acrobatic combos are what make him so appealing to even entry-level players. —*Tom Price*

Favorite Move: Raging Phoenix Combo: ←AAA

FAVORITE MOVE: SPINNING BIRD KICK

CHARGE ↓ ↑ K

01 Chun-Li

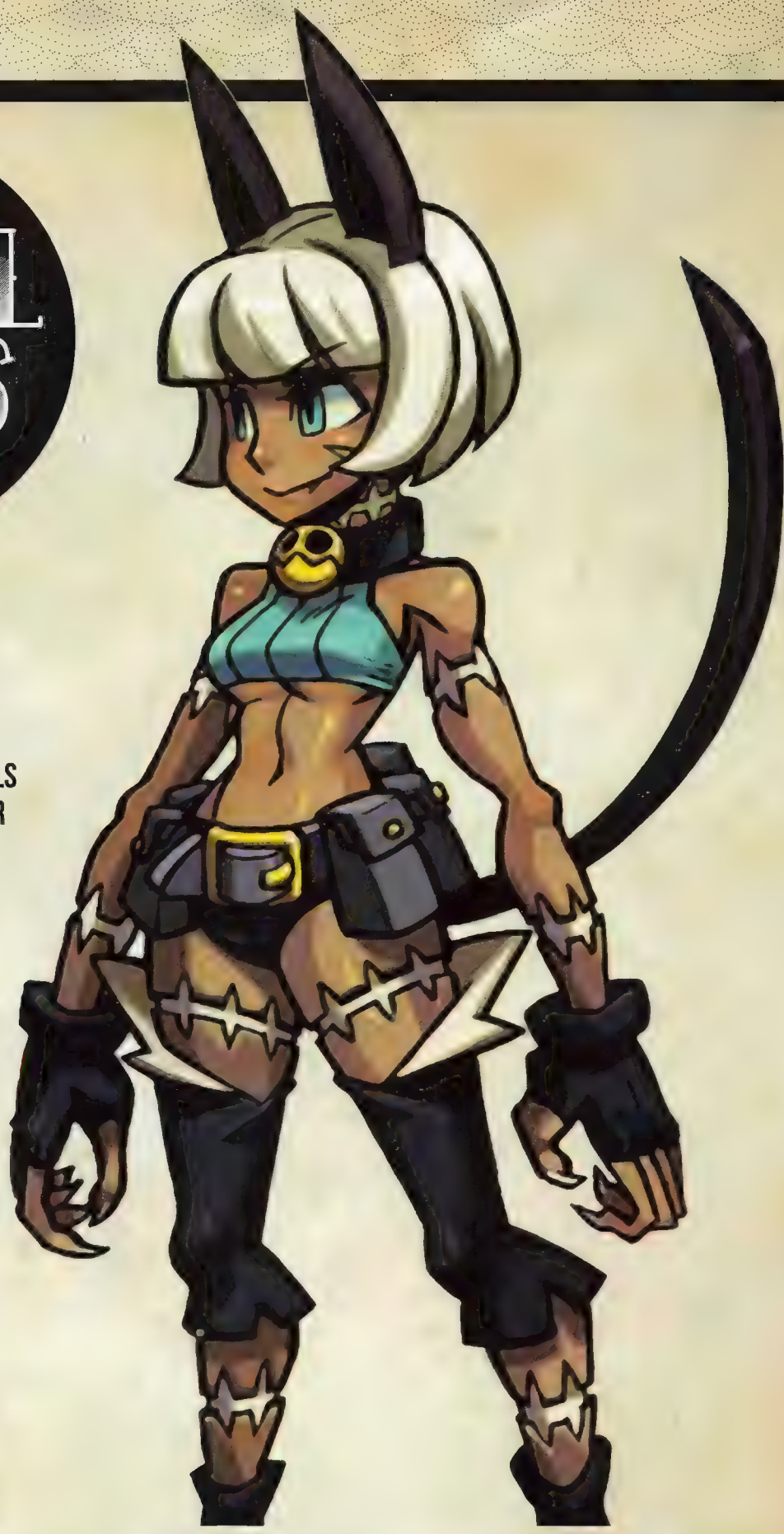
Appears in: Street Fighter II: The World Warrior and pretty much every game and spin-off of the series since

The unofficial first lady of fighting games, and the official first lady of the powerhouse *Street Fighter* franchise, Chun-Li's translated Mandarin name is "beautiful spring." Though a more appropriate name would be "thunder thighs," which she uses to power her signature Hyakuretsu Kyak "Lightning Legs" move. What makes her particularly stand out in the fighting game arena is the fact that she's become a legend not because she exploited her gender or has epic bazooms but because she's first and foremost a serious, bona fide, kick-ass fighter. *—Jaz Rignall*

GALLERY

SKULL GIRLS

THE LOVELY AND QUIRKY LADIES OF THE NEW FIGHTING GAME SKULLGIRLS ARE READY TO RAM THEIR CUTENESS RIGHT INTO YOUR MIDSECTION.



Ms. Fortune

Age: 20
Birthday: November 24
Height: 5-8
Weight: 127 lbs.
Measurements: 32B-23-34

Nadia Fortune is your typical half kitty cat, half girl who swallowed a magical life gem and became immortal. That same old story again. When not being aloof or sleeping (what else do cats do, really?), she plots vengeance on her old crew, the Fishbone Gang. Man, those guys were a great ska band.

Cerebella

Age: 18
Birthday: April 11
Height: 5-6
Weight: 130 lbs.
Measurements: 32D-23-36

There are bad hair days, and then there are the days when you look in the mirror and two monstrously muscled arms are growing out of the top of your head. Luckily for Cerebella, it's just a sentient hat that's all buff up there. Then again, the thought of wearing a hat that is a living being is kinda creepy in its own right.

Parasoul

Age: 25
Birthday: December 22
Height: 5-10
Weight: 156 lbs.
Measurements: 34DD-24-38

One of the more mature and experienced ladies in the bunch, you can hardly call Parasoul a "girl" anymore. She's not just a woman, either; she's the crown princess of the Canopy Kingdom, and also the leader of its elite paramilitary squad, the Black Egrets. Her living weapon —an umbrella named Krieg—is just one source of her power.

Filia

Age: 16
Birthday: March 18
Height: 5-4
Weight: 142 lbs.
Measurements: 34C-26-39

Filia has a funny little quirk: another mouth growing out of the back of her head. Insert painfully obvious and inappropriately sexist joke here. In (sur)reality, it belongs to a clump of living hair named Samson, who has a proclivity toward gambling, drinking, and being an evil demon.

PSV:
IS IT FOR ME?

WITH THE ARRIVAL OF THE PLAYSTATION VITA LOOMING, WE EXAMINE THE HIGHS AND LOWS OF ACTUALLY OWNING ONE.

How much will I really need to spend on a PSV?

Sony's PlayStation Vita will be available in the United States at two prices: $250 for the Wi-Fi only model, and $300 for the 3G version. But that doesn't even take into account the monthly data charges for those who decide to get the 3G model, which is pretty much the only option if you're planning on playing the PSV on the go—and not just at home or somewhere with Wi-Fi available.

But Sony's history with gaming handhelds isn't great—have they learned from their missteps?

I absolutely love Vita's tech and capabilities: I just hope we see games designed for Vita and mobile gaming and not a ton of lazy ports from the PS2 and the PS3. That was one of my big issues with PSP—it had too many games that were almost exactly the same as games I'd already played at home, or games that just weren't suited to short play sessions. I'm hoping that won't happen this time around with Vita.

It upscales ugly, old PSP games to look more appetizing than a mountain of crispy pig bellies.

It's coming to the States early next year...unless John Cusack's character in *2012* was actually right!

Its battery life lasts 3-5 hours, enough time to run a half marathon and then eat two large pies from Pizza Hut to cancel it out.

It's one of the first handhelds to understand that most games made in the last 10 years actually benefit from two analog sticks.

It's not waterproof. So your bubble-bath gaming sessions will have to wait for the PS Vita2 4D+Move.

Games come on 2 to 4 GB NVG cards, tiny enough for your little brother to mistake for a cookie.

What (good) games can I look forward to playing?

First-party PSV titles like *Uncharted* and *LittleBigPlanet* are definitely exciting. And while the list of original titles is somewhat sparse at this time, the PSV has a strong list of HD ports that will be out within a year, too, such as *Final Fantasy X*, the *Metal Gear Solid HD Collection*, *Oddworld*, and *Ultimate Marvel vs. Capcom 3*. It's still early, and the PSV's lineup will only grow from here.

—**MCKINLEY NOBLE**, PLANNING ON GETTING ONE

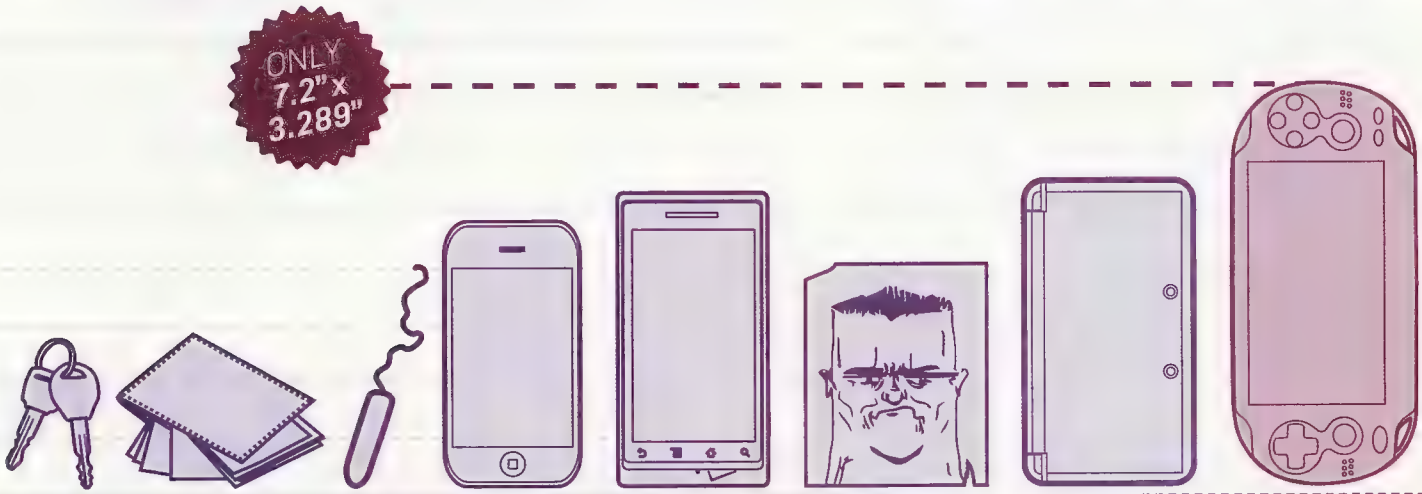
How do the graphics compare to my PS3?

With the 3DS only offering higher-definition remakes of Nintendo 64 games, Sony has the opportunity to come out with the graphically superior handheld. Heck, even having higher-definition remakes of PS2 games would be a step up at this point. I think we can reasonably expect the Vita to best Nintendo's 3DS in terms of graphical power...but to compete with the PS3's visuals? Well, that might be too tall an order.

—**CHRIS HOLT**, NO INTEREST IN BUYING ONE

WHAT'S THAT IN YOUR PANTS?

BY NOW, YOU'VE PROBABLY SEEN PHOTOS AND/OR VIDEOS OF THE PSV, BUT HOW BIG IS IT EXACTLY...AND MORE IMPORTANT, DOES IT FIT IN YOUR POCKET?



KEYS 2"x3"

WALLET 4"x3"

FEMININE PRODUCTS 0.75"x3"

IPHONE 4 2.309"x4.54"

DROID BIONIC 2.63"x5.01"

PHOTO OF YOUR MOM 6"x4"

NINTENDO 3DS 5.3"x2.9"

PS VITA 7.2"x3.289"

The PSV allows you to chat with buddies online as well as scary men who want to wear your intestines as a scarf.

In addition to its 5" touchscreen, it has a rear touchpad that requires fingering finesse similar to unhooking a bra.

It has no video output, meaning you can't hook it up to your TV. Those adorable LocoRocos will never be huggable size.

Isn't it trying to duplicate the success of iPhone gaming?

Mobile gaming now means iPhone and Android—for most people. But a market remains for high-end portable games, and Sony wants that market with the Vita. And hardware isn't going to make the difference—as always, it's about the games. The Nintendo 3DS is pretty slick, but a dearth of games has soured gamers. If Sony and their partners deliver the games, gamers will come (and play).

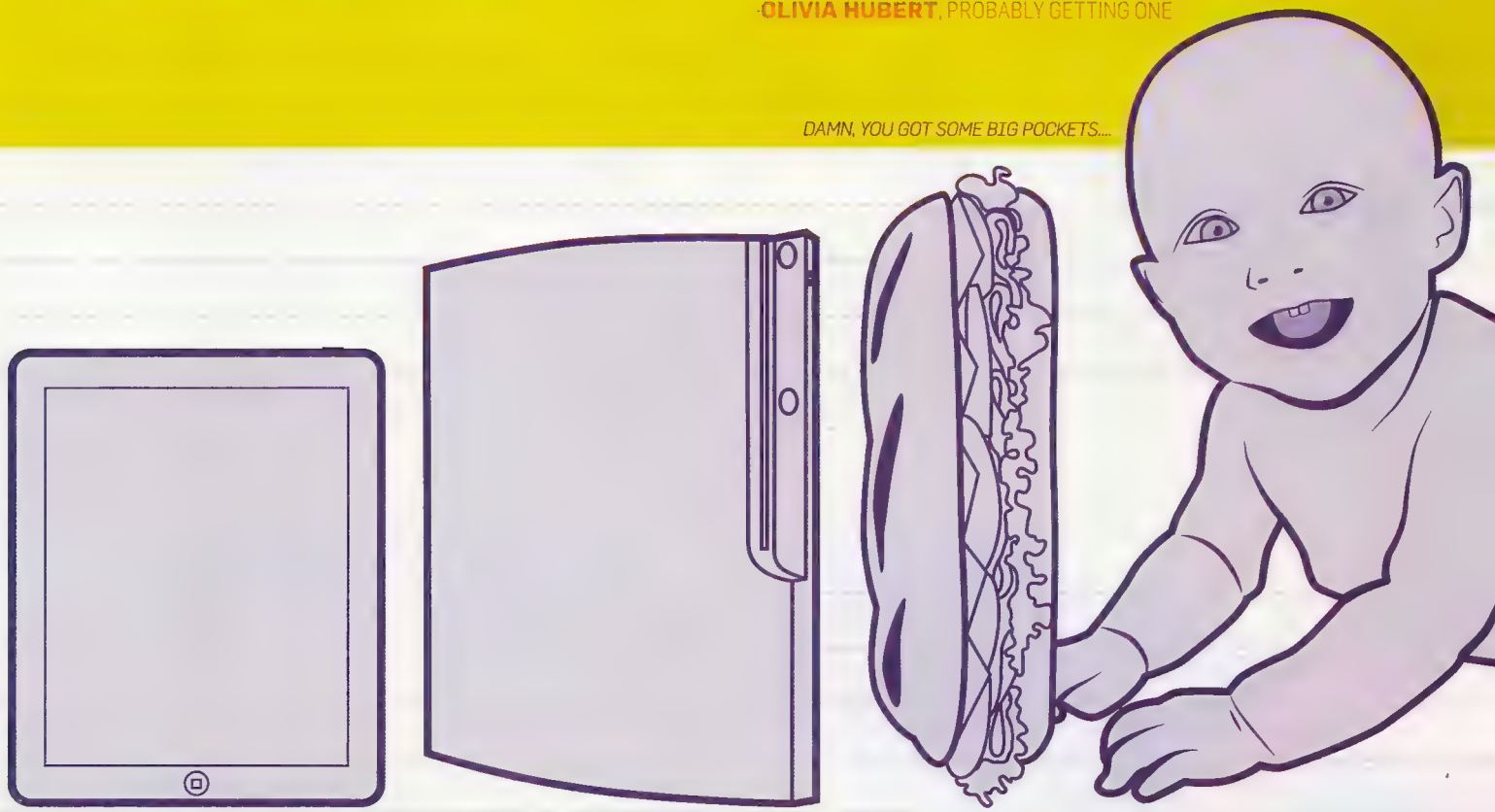
—**JASON WILSON**, PLANNING ON GETTING ONE

So, what happens to all of my PSP and PSN games?

Sony's successor to the PlayStation Portable will play all PSN games and *most* of your favorite PSP games. There's a hitch buried in that "most"—the Vita lacks any hardware support for UMDs. Anyone looking to play a PSP game on their Vita has to repurchase and download the game from the PlayStation Network. This may not seem like a good thing, but there are a few perks—PSP games downloaded via PSN boast revamped graphics and smoothing to reduce pixelation.

—**OLIVIA HUBERT**, PROBABLY GETTING ONE

DAMN, YOU GOT SOME BIG POCKETS...



IPAD2
7.31"x9.5"

PLAYSTATION 3
11.42"x11.42"

$5 SUBWAY FOOTLONG
4"x12"

A BABY (GIVE OR TAKE)
7"x16"

"Vita" means life in Italian... which isn't really useful to know. But maybe one day this will make you the life of the party!

Its icon-based touchscreen U.I. is oddly reminiscent of the iPhone/iPad. But really, who cares who thought of it first?

Front and rear cameras can turn places like your kitchen or outhouse into part of the game via augmented reality.

How does the connectivity between PS3 and some PSV games work, exactly?

I'm envisioning two things: First, the exciting possibility of being able to start playing at home and then take your game on the road with you; and second, something similar to what the GameCube did with the Game Boy Advance—giving players extra control options and additional information on a separate screen. This sort of thing is great for multiplayer games—think the motion tracker from the *Alien* series.

—**PETE DAVISON**, PLANNING ON GETTING ONE

Will it do anything existing gaming devices can't do?

Call me shallow, but the fact that the Vita offers up the option of playing a game with two analog sticks, sans an unwieldy, plasticky accessory, has me plenty excited to go thumbs-on with it. This may seem like a relatively small selling point in the grand scheme of things, but you'll rarely stumble across an HD-gen action-adventure or shooter title that's better played with one thumb over two. If Sony's really aiming for that "console experience in a handheld," two ultraresponsive analog nubs is certainly a solid starting point.

WILL HERRING, SO EXCITED ABOUT THE PSV

Will it be good for import and Japanese RPG fans?

For import and Japanese RPG fans here in the West, the Vita figures to pick up where the PSP leaves off. It's currently generating quite a bit of interest over in Japan, and that means that it figures to be a top destination for the sort of software that JRPG fans crave. Also: *Monster Hunter*. The best part is that it's region free, meaning you won't have to choose between your favorite imports and the capability to play Western games.

—**KAT BAILEY**, DEFINITELY GETTING ONE

What are some other alternatives to the PSV?

3DS has some great games on the horizon, but its lack of comparable multipurpose functionality will keep it in a clear second place. Instead, Vita hopes to be one of your go-to electronics for all sorts of media. But don't you already own something that does all that and more? You're phone, Android or iOS, will be Vita's top competitor for both pocket space and gaming time.

JUSTIN HAYWALD, ON THE FENCE ABOUT GETTING ONE

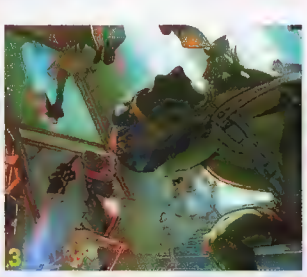
Are apps like Facebook and Foursquare good reasons to own a PSV?

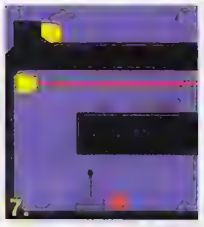
We've seen this before with some of the home console machines, an attempt to cram the latest social network apps into a realm where they probably won't get used. Why should I tweet from my Xbox 360 when my phone is sitting right next to me? But since the PS Vita is mobile device, this seems to make more sense. Especially Skype, which with the use of the forward-mounted camera could be a real game-changer.

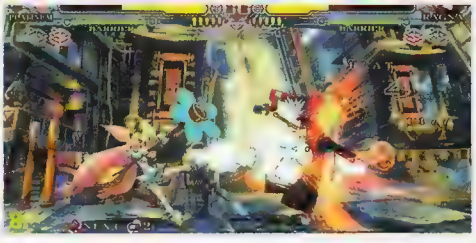
—**TOM PRICE**, DEFINITELY GETTING ONE

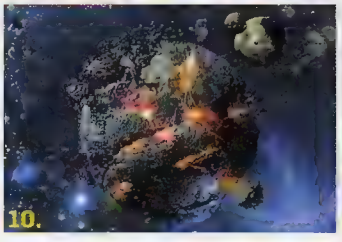
VITA LOCA: 11 PSV GAMES WE'RE DYING TO PLAY

WHY 11? BECAUSE WE HAVE 11 EDITORS.









1. UNCHARTED: GOLDEN ABYSS
Like many people anticipating the arrival of the PSV, I'm most excited for the new *Uncharted*, in which Nathan Drake seeks to uncover the dark secret behind the 400-year-old massacre of a Spanish expedition. I'm interested to see how the first *Uncharted* game on a handheld turns out.
—*Olivia Hubert*

2. LITTLEBIGPLANET
From what I've seen so far, this looks totally on the money. The devs are taking the elements of a great PS3 game, but redesigning them specifically to take advantage of Vita's tech. It's not a lazy port but a new and unique Vita game with characters I already totally love. Gimme, gimme.
—*Jaz Rignall*

3. DUNGEON DEFENDERS
The iOS and Android versions of this game are great but suffer from overcomplicated touch-screen controls. It makes a great portable multiplayer game, though, and Vita will be an ideal platform for this tower defense-action-RPG combo.
—*Pete Davison*

4. DRAGON CROWN
Dragon's Crown is by Vanillaware, which means it'll be a good RPG that'll also look incredible in high-definition. Along with *Persona 4*, this game has basically sold me on a Vita . —*Kat Bailey*

5. PERSONA 4: THE GOLDEN
Yeah, yeah, I hear you—I'm sick and tired of gaming superpowers relying solely on ports to sell their new handhelds and consoles. That said, oh, my goodness—I'm so excited for *Persona 4: The Golden*. After last year's stellar *Persona 3 Portable*, I can only imagine what the (arguably) superior *P4* plays like on the go.
—*Will Herring*

6. LUMINES: ELECTRIC SYMPHONY
Lumines is easily the game I played most on the PSP, and I can't wait to see what Tetsuya Mizuguchi may have in store for the PS Vita version (provided he's actually working on it—oh, please; oh, please). —*Tom Price*

7. SOUND SHAPES
LocoRoco cuteness meets *Electroplankton* musical freedom. Not only does *Sound Shapes* look original, but it has the pick-up-and-play appeal of a mobile game.
—*Justin Haywald*

8. BLAZBLUE: CONTINUUM SHIFT II PLUS
There are few games that will tempt me away from my iPhone. *BlazBlue* represents a genre and quality of game that I can't get on smartphones. It's a visually slick fighting game with a ridiculous combo system that favors fast fingers and the ability to execute complicated combos. —*Chris Holt*

9. KILLZONE
We have more hard facts proving the existence of life on the Moon than anything on *Killzone* on Vita, but I'm still excited to see how one of my favorite franchises can benefit from the PSV's dual-analog sticks—and processing power.
—*Patrick Shaw*

10. SUPER STARDUST DELTA
I adore *Super Stardust HD*. Its great music and brilliant colors should look great on Vita and be a fantastic distraction (and challenge) for the two hours I spend daily on public transit.
—*Jason Wilson*

11. ZONE OF THE ENDERS HD COLLECTION
Zone of the Enders is criminally underrated, and the HD remake is something that I hope will reinvigorate talks of a third game in the series. Flying, quick giant robot-on-giant robot action seems perfectly fitted for the PSV, too.
—*McKinley Noble*

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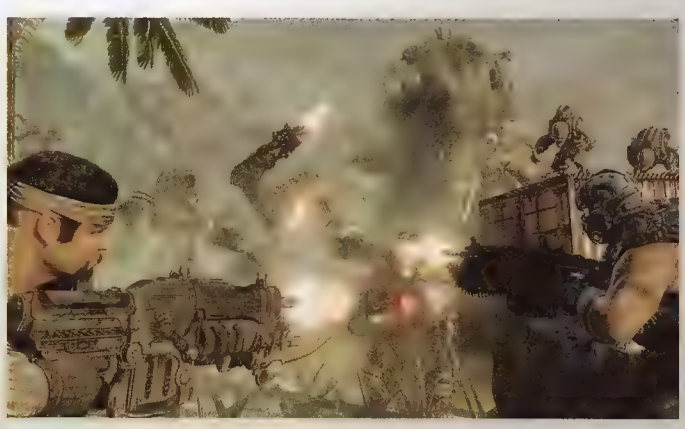
POWERED BY BRADYGAMES

6 STEPS TO BECOMING THE LORD OF HORDE

Surviving all 50 enemy waves in *Gears of War 3*'s hellish Horde mode is not easy—and these crucial tips will help keep you and your team alive.

1. FORTIFY OR DIE

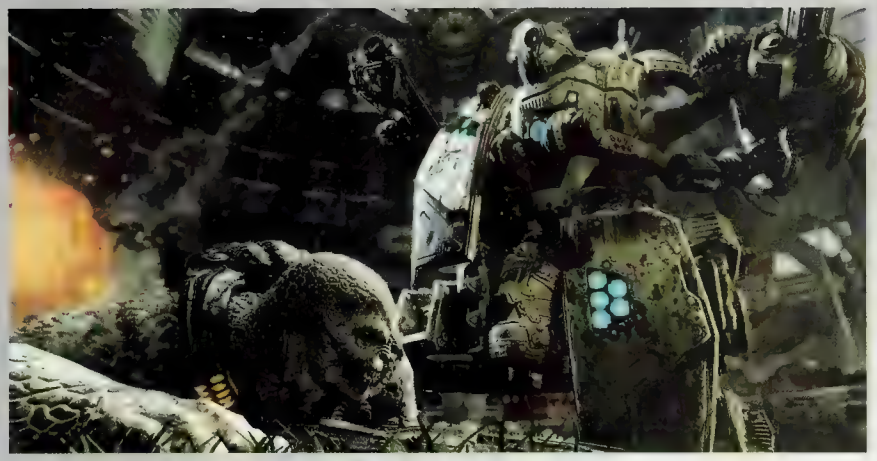
Constructing and maintaining fortifications—like razor wire, decoys, and turrets—in Horde mode is essential to your survival. Make sure you strategically select command posts and then keep repairing the fortifications surrounding them. Failing to repair them results in having to purchase and upgrade them again.



2. PREPARE FOR BOSSES

Every 10th wave of Horde mode pits you against one or more of *Gears of War 3*'s boss-type enemies, such as Berserkers and Brumaks. These savage adversaries have more health than standard enemies and dish out a great deal more damage, too. Prior to waves 10, 20, and so on, stock up on guns, grenades, and ammo, and make sure your fortifications are in good shape.

3. SILVERBACK ATTACK



The heavily armored Silverback walker is one of the most devastating weapons in Horde mode. It's also quite vulnerable and slow, too, so protecting whoever is inside the Silverback is necessary to keep it from being reduced to scrap metal. Keep enemies at a safe distance from the Silverback, and make sure to protect its vulnerable rear.

4. CASH IS CRUCIAL

Earning as much cash as possible—and spending it wisely—is key to surviving all 50 waves in Horde. There are also a number of ways to maximize your cash flow. Don't waste your money on respawning (which is extremely expensive) unless it's absolutely crucial to winning the wave, and also be sure to trade money with teammates to purchase important upgrades.

BONUS WAVES

Complete the following bonus round objectives—which appear every fourth wave—to earn its corresponding reward.

← **BONUS:** Kill 10 Enemies in 30 Seconds → **REWARD:** Team Ammo	← **BONUS:** 7 Headshots → **REWARD:** Longshot and Torque Bow
← **BONUS:** 8 Executions → **REWARD:** Mulcher and Boomshield	← **BONUS:** 2 Flame Boomer Kills via Tank Detonation → **REWARD:** Wild Ticker Holding a Oneshot
← **BONUS:** 6 Chain Saw or Bayonet Kills → **REWARD:** Boomshots	← **BONUS:** Complete Wave within Time Limit → **REWARD:** Vulcan

5. KEEP ONE ENEMY ALIVE

An effective way of buying more time to strategize and stock up on supplies is letting the last enemy of each wave temporarily live. Once you're left with only one enemy left standing, send out your entire team to scour the map for weapons and ammunition.

6. FREELOADERS

Executing less formidable foes by chainsawing them in half or impaling them on the Retro Lancer's bayonet is a good way to save ammo and cash. You should also know that in between waves your weapons' ammo is replenished a bit for free, so purchasing ammo toward the end of a wave is often ill-advised.

FORTIFICATIONS AND DEFENSES

We breakdown each fortification's available upgrades.

BARIERS:
Level 1: Spikes
Level 2: Razor Wire
Level 3: Electric Fence
Level 4: Laser Fence

TURRETS:
Level 1: Retro Turret
Level 2: Lancer Turret
Level 3: Troika
Level 4: Shielded Troika

DECOYS:
Level 1: Weak Cardboard Cutout of Cole
Level 2: Increased Health and Attraction of Enemies
Level 3: Increased Range and Attraction of Enemies
Level 4: Increased Health/Attraction and Explodes When Destroyed

SENTRY GUNS:
Level 1: Low Damage Sentry
Level 2: Medium Damage Sentry
Level 3: Ammunition Slows Enemies Down

THE SILVERBACK
Level 1: Heavily Armored Silverback Walker

NOW PLAYING

SONY / MICROSOFT / NINTENDO / PC / MOBILE

The months following the summer are always an exciting time to be a gamer, but this year is even more bloated with white-hot video-game releases than usual. The best part of this is that virtually no genre of game has been left out. We've had the expected arrival of fall blockbuster sequels, of course, such as **Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3**, **Battlefield 3**, **Gears of War 3**, and **Batman: Arkham City**. But we've also seen some new and awesome series pop up, too, like **Rage**, **Dead Island**, and **The Gunstringer**, to name a few.

And while a glut of high-profile games dropped during the tail end of this year, the **GamePro** editors have also been spending an equal amount of time (if not more) playing a ton of fantastic games on iPhone and iPad. We even had to expand the mobile section of Now Playing to double the size of what we were originally planning.

THE POINT OF ALL THIS IS THAT OUR INDUSTRY IS EXPERIENCING A TREMENDOUS GROWTH SPURT RIGHT NOW, one composed of the rise of mobile gaming, motion-controlled games (however long it lasts), 3D, and numerous other games that push the medium forward in one way or another. Our **Now Playing** section provides you with a snapshot of the games that consumed our free time during this time. You'll read about McKinley's disturbing passion for all things **Pokémon**, Justin's renewed faith in Kinect to do more than just **Just Dance**, why Jason believes **Quarrel** is the best mix of ideas since peanut butter met chocolate, and many more of our personal gaming experiences.

CONTINUE ▶

KIRBY MASS ATTACK

HARD RESET

BATMAN: ARKHAM CITY

QUARREL

THE GUNSTRINGER

FORZA MOTORSPORT 4

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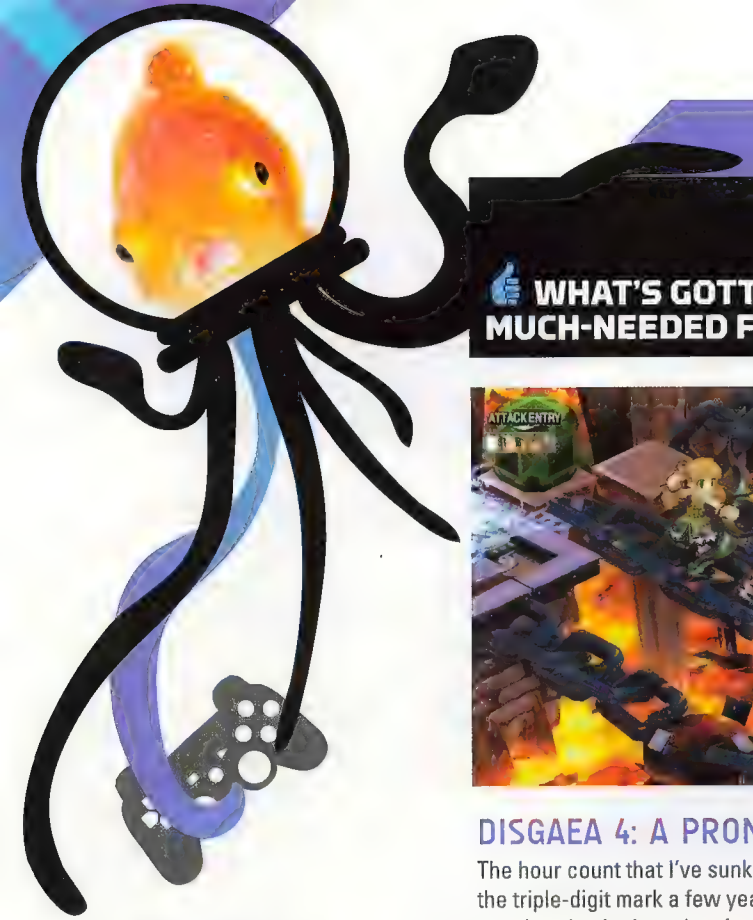


NOW PLAYING

SONY

WHAT'S GOTTEN A MUCH-NEEDED FACELIFT

DISGAEA 4: A PROMISE UNBROKEN (PS3)

The hour count that I've sunk into the *Disgaea* series breached the triple-digit mark a few years back, so you'll have to understand my hesitation when it came time to boot up the latest game in the franchise. But can you blame me? One tap of my PlayStation 3's "on" switch and I'd be in for another 100-plus hours of strategizing and grinding through a delightfully demonic turn-based campaign. I eventually gave in and dove headfirst into *A Promise Unbroken*, and I'm rediscovering what makes the franchise so addicting. This latest installment boasts a visual overhaul, as well as a few interesting tweaks to some of the game's core mechanics, and it hooked me ever since the first utterance of "dood" from the series' penguin-like Prinnies. —*Will Herring*

IT'S WHAT THE REST OF THE WORLD IS PLAYING

FIFA 12 (PS3)

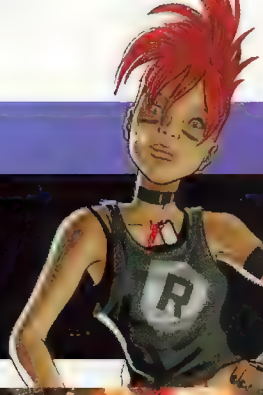
Getting enthusiastic about a soccer game in the U.S. always feels a little like shouting into the wind. But the reality is, the latest addition to the hugely successful *FIFA* series is the best sports game out there, bar none. For a start, it's mind-bogglingly comprehensive. In terms of teams, *FIFA 12* features a huge roster of leagues from across the globe. But what really raises this year's game is its new Impact Engine, which adds very realistic physics and momentum to the ball and players. This, and *FIFA 12*'s new Tactical Defending positioning system has elevated the game to a new level, adding amazing realism and fluidity to the way players move and interact with one another on both an individual and team level. —*Jaz Rignall*

WHAT WE'RE STILL PLAYING

LIMBO (PSN)

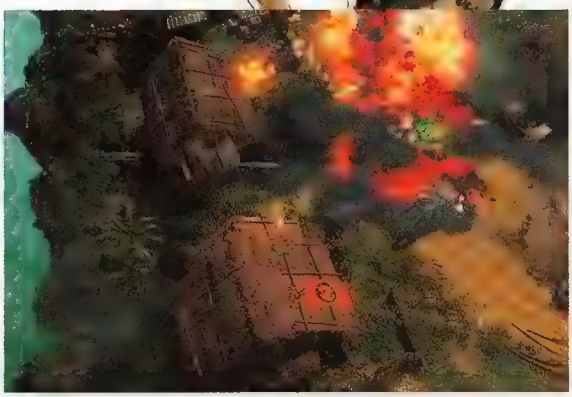
Now that I'm watching my friends play *Limbo*, I'm suddenly realizing that it's actually as much an intelligence test as it is a thrilling, innovative platformer. Puzzles that some people figure out in a split second take other people 30 minutes to solve, and the game's refusal to hold your hand turns a four-hour game into an eight-hour adventure. I'm actually surprised—occasionally, I forget how to get past an obstacle, and then I find myself poking around in the dark. When I rediscover the solution, it's like flipping on a switch, and I briefly feel like a damn genius. And I do have to admit, it's funny to see people flinch when the main character gets smashed, stabbed, and ripped into pieces. —*McKinley Noble*

WHAT MAKES ME WANNA KICK ASS AND CHEW BUBBLE GUM

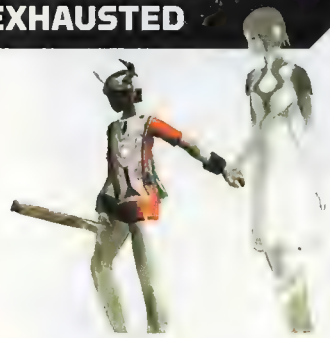


RENEGADE OPS (PSN)

I grew up idolizing action movie ass-kickers like Schwarzenegger, Stallone, and Berenger (the original *Sniper* rules). And that same type of testosterone-teeming entertainment just doesn't really exist anymore. *Renegade Ops* is an homage to the era of action entertainment where heroes were shirtless guys who massacred enemies by the hundreds with machine guns and hand grenades. An intense, vehicle-based action shooter from the creators of *Just Cause*, *Renegade Ops* is simple, but also tremendously fun, especially if you're playing alongside a buddy in co-op. The game also sports an isometric view and retro-gaming vibe that'll appeal to fans of the awesome *Jungle/Desert/Urban Strike* series. —*Patrick Shaw*



WHAT HAS ME EMOTIONALLY EXHAUSTED



THE ICO & SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS COLLECTION (PS3)

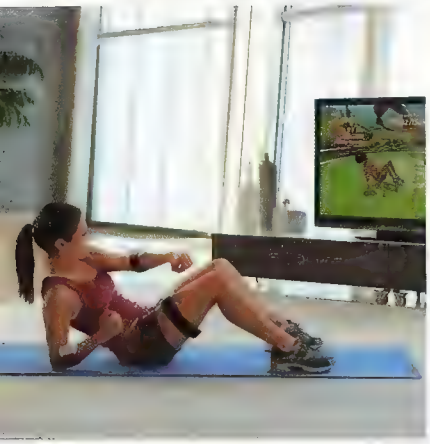
Revisiting both *Ico* and *Shadow of the Colossus* in Sony's new compilation for PS3 all these years later has been a strange, fantastic experience in a number of ways. Both games are thoughtful, meditative journeys through forbidden worlds; both boast a minimalistic yet emotionally resonant story; and both require quite a bit of patience, something that's often taken for granted with this generation of gamers who are used to having their hands held. That said, a collection fitted with remastered renditions of Team Ico's oeuvre is very much not meant to be played on deadline, but the *Ico and Shadow of the Colossus Collection* still managed to captivate me for every instance my PS3 was switched on. Just know that I didn't cry. Much. —*Will Herring*

WHAT'S RENEWED MY LOVE OF SPEC-OPS

CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE 3 (PS3)

I'm a massive fan of Spec-Ops, the challenge-based extra mode introduced in *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*, which turned out to be one of the best features of that game. The latest installment, *Modern Warfare 3*, not only brings Spec-Ops back, but it also showcases a new version of the mode, dubbed Spec-Ops Survival...and it's even more riveting than traditional Spec-Ops. It's sort of a hybrid between the regular ol' mode and Zombies from *World at War/Black Ops*. But instead of goose-stepping undead, you're gunning down normal soldiers who are fully capable of strategizing to take you and your co-op partner down. Enemies will even send out canines rigged with explosives to destroy you. Thankfully, airstrikes and weapon upgrades are also at your disposal this time around. —*Patrick Shaw*

WHAT'S GETTING ME FIT



EA SPORTS ACTIVE 2 (PS3)

A desire to pursue fitness and an enjoyment of video games are not necessarily mutually compatible, with one being typically couchbound while the other generally requires you to stand up, move around, and occasionally—brace yourself—go outside. All that said, *EA Sports Active 2* does a great job of getting you sweaty and achy while maintaining just enough in the way of game-like principles to keep you motivated. It sports progress bars everywhere, Achievements and Trophies to unlock, and social features. The game's motion-tracking system and heart-rate monitor don't work perfectly, but they do their job. And best of all, for wannabe fitness junkies on a budget, the game's age now means you can pick it up pretty cheap. —*Pete Davison*

WHAT HAS ME FONDLY REMEMBERING TOKYO

PERSONA 3 PORTABLE (PSP)

When *Persona 4* was announced for the PlayStation Vita, I immediately got the itch to play *Persona 3 Portable*. So I polled my Twitter followers as to whether I should play as a guy or a girl (they picked girl), and soon after I was back at Gekkoukan High, wooing boys and fighting demons. It felt good to return. At roughly 100 hours, *Persona 3 Portable* is a heck of a time investment, but its quick-hit gameplay still makes it a good fit for the PSP. I'll burn through a week on the bus to work, periodically stopping to run up to dungeons of Tartarus. It might take me a year to finish, but I'm really in no hurry. —*Kat Bailey*

WHAT WE'RE GLAD TO BE PLAYING AGAIN

STREET FIGHTER III: THIRD STRIKE ONLINE EDITION (PSN)

Street Fighter III has always been my favorite fighting game. If I could, I'd give it 10 out of 5 stars. So I'm megastoked that *Third Strike* is finally getting a proper console release and is coming with tons of updates. So far, my favorite thing about it is the variety of visual options, especially the "arcade cabinet" mode. As someone who's spent a fair share of quarters on the arcade cabinet, it's an awesome throwback. Still, one thing hasn't changed since my arcade days: I'm still getting my ass handed to me in every three-out-of-five fights. My Dragon Punch has gotten soft. I'm going to go uppercut a few waterfalls until I'm strong enough to come back to the game. —*McKinley Noble*

WHAT WE'RE DOWNLOADING

LITTLEBIGPLANET 2 MOVE PACK (DLC)

It's not like *LittleBigPlanet* absolutely needed a content pack to spur more people to play it. But developer Media Molecule decided to show the right way to incorporate Sony's motion-sensing wand into a game. Getting used to the Move controller takes a little tinkering, but Stephen Fry's in-game tutorials make learning a delight. And just the fluidity that you're afforded by untethered movements gives new life to your artistic creations. While the capability to design and share your own worlds (and works of art in Paint mode) is, as always, *LBP*'s strong suit, the pack also comes with a few new developer-crafted levels that show off just what you can do. This DLC is the reason you should own a Move controller. —*Justin Haywald*

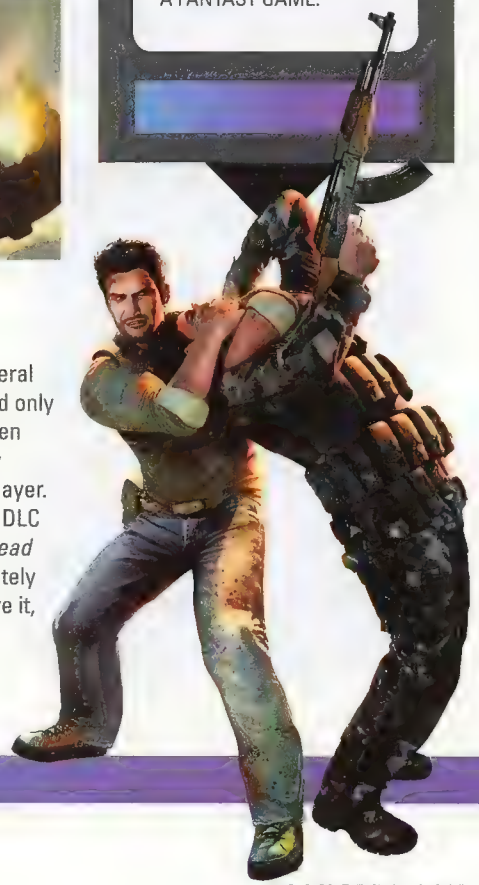
RED DEAD REDEMPTION: MYTHS AND MAVERICKS (DLC)

Who has two thumbs and loves cowboys, the Old West, general badass behavior, and taking a horse for a ride out on the land only to be scared s***less by a jaguar? I'm pointing at myself when I say, "This lady." *Red Dead Redemption* has to be one of my favorite games, but I've completely avoided its online multiplayer. That is, until the new, free *Myths and Mavericks* multiplayer DLC came out. I hadn't gone back to the game since playing *Undead Nightmare*, and playing it in a multiplayer setting is a completely different experience from the campaign. I can't say that I love it, but I chalk that more up to my own antisocial tendencies. —*Olivia Hubert*

"[UNCHARTED ORIGINALLY] HAD ELEMENTS OF TOLKIEN IN, FOR SURE. SONY KEPT PUSHING FOR A MORE REALISTIC GAME.... THE DEMOGRAPHIC WAS OLDER, AND GRITTY SHOOTERS WERE REALLY DOMINATING."

–DON POOLE

FORMER ENVIRONMENTAL MODELER AT NAUGHTY DOG, IN ISSUE 209 OF *PLAY* MAGAZINE, ON HOW *UNCHARTED* WAS ORIGINALLY GOING TO BE A FANTASY GAME.



WHAT MAKES ME WISH I HAD A STRONG UPPER BODY

UNCHARTED: DRAKE'S FORTUNE (PS3)

How have I not played this game before? Who let me walk through life since 2007 without Nathan Drake's quirky, nerdy humor secured firmly in my memory bank? With the second sequel of the trilogy coming out in November and a Vita title on the way, I decided it was high time I played through the game that reminds me of everything I love about *Resident Evil 4* and *Indiana Jones*, only with more upper body strength and less Sean Connery. Running, driving, jet-skiing, shooting, and practically parkouring his way around the jungles and ruins of the Amazon after trouble sets in, Drake's search for El Dorado is part rescue mission, part treasure quest. It all makes for an excellent premise to an excellent action-adventure game. —*Olivia Hubert*

NOW PLAYING

MICROSOFT

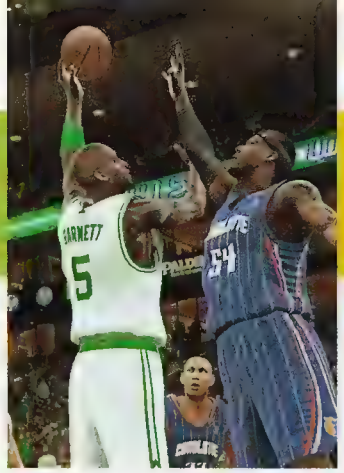
@ctplante:
"CAN'T SHAKE THE FEELING SIRI WILL BE APPLE'S KINECT. IMPRESSIVE TECH THAT USERS ENJOY BUT IGNORE BECAUSE THEY'RE TRAINED ON TACTILE U.I."

–FREELANCE WRITER CHRIS PLANTE
VIA TWITTER

WHAT'S KEPT US PLAYING

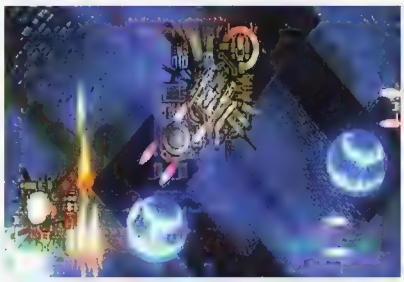
WARHAMMER 40K: SPACE MARINE (X360)

Warhammer 40,000: Space Marine surprised me with its polish and its exceptionally fun combat system. There's something gleefully satisfying in carving up green-skinned monsters with a chainsword and then leaping away with a jet pack. But as a fan of the original tabletop game, I'd love to see the addition of more races and maybe some vehicles as well. Imagine being the first game to have compelling multiplayer combat with not only melee and shooting but tanks and airstrikes, too. THQ has been itching for a breakout franchise that could compete with the big boys, and while this isn't quite it, it's close. By carving out a unique niche—the hack-n-slash sci-fi shooter—*Space Marine* appeals to more than just the first-person-shooter crowd. —*Chris Holt*



NBA 2K12 (X360)

For the developers at Visual Concepts, it clearly wasn't enough to just make a exactingly complete sports sim. No, they made a game that honors the sport and its history in a way that few sports titles have. The inclusion of classic players, short shorts and all, is more than just about having some legends on your roster, it's about re-creating great moments in the history of the sport. The games that you play with Hall of Famers like MJ, Larry Bird, or Magic Johnson feature complete teams, legendary rivals, and historically accurate presentation. Even the television-style graphics are spot on. We may not have a regular NBA season this year, but playing the great games of the past could make up for it. —*Tom Price*



ANOTHER RARE IMPORT BITES THE DUST

RADIANT SILVERGUN (XBLA)

Once upon a time, games like *Radiant Silvergun* and *Castlevania: Rondo of Blood* were the crown jewels of an importer's collection. They were pricey, difficult to find, and, more important, really darn good. But with the rise of downloadable services like Xbox Live Arcade and Nintendo's Virtual Console, those days are done. Now *Radiant Silvergun* can be had on XBLA for the cost of lunch. The good news is that it's still a fine shooter, which is what I would expect from the spiritual sibling of *Ikaruga*. It's also ferociously hard, but it's lightweight enough to be enjoyable in short stretches. Pick this one up and pretend that you're a big-deal importer, circa 1998, for at least one more day. —*Kat Bailey*

WEIRD SPORT BUT A GREAT VIDEO GAME

WHAT MAKES ME THINK THAT I AM THE HERO GOTHAM CITY DESERVES

COWBOYS VS. MARIONETTES

JONAH LOMU RUGBY CHALLENGE (X360)

I know most of you will quickly skim past this review, dismissing my enthusiasm as a dumb limey trying to peddle another one of those weird sports that the rest of the world plays but is as obscure in the U.S. as curling. But hear me out! Rugby is a cool sport. It's like a faster, more dynamic, open, and violent American Football. And in *Jonah Lomu Rugby Challenge*, publisher Mad Catz has captured the essence of that sport and turned it into a really good video game. Sit down with it, go through the short tutorial, and start playing: You'll discover a really solid, highly enjoyable game that is fun to play, and you may even develop an appreciation for the real thing.
—Jaz Rignall

BATMAN: ARKHAM CITY (X360)

Batman: Arkham Asylum redefined what many gamers thought they knew about the superhero sim. It decimated the idea of the needless franchise cash-in, and it even entered the *Guinness Book of World Records* for "Most Critically Acclaimed Superhero Game," which, yes, set quite the precedent for *Arkham City*. But based on the time I've spent with this follow-up, I'm growing ever-more anxious to strap on those Bat Boots and kick my rogue gallery's collective behinds back to the madhouse. *Arkham City*'s open world creates a fantastic sense of awe that begs for in-depth exploration, and the slick new gadgets offer up endless opportunities for the Caped Crusader to interact with the world around him—and the knuckleheaded thugs that inhabit it.
—Will Herring

THE GUNSTRINGER (KINECT)

I can finally use my Kinect to surf Netflix, but other than that and *Dance Central*, it's not a technology that gets much use in my apartment. Thankfully, *The Gunstringer* came along. Like Twisted Pixel's other off-kilter titles (*Splosion Man, Comic Jumper*), the game mixes in live-action with ridiculous cartoon characters. But it's the gameplay that really makes it work. I wouldn't say that *Gunstringer* had to be on Kinect, but the development team made excellent use of the device. You move your puppet character like he's a real marionette on a string with one hand while your other hand makes an imaginary gun—and that's a hell of a lot more engaging than just randomly waving your hand around the screen.
—Justin Haywald

"A MAN IN THE BAR THE OTHER NIGHT ASKED ME WHY I'M SO OBSESSED WITH HORROR.

[redacted]

–PATRICK SHAW

WHAT'S LET ME LIVE OUT MY ZOMBIE-APOCALYPSE FANTASY

DEAD ISLAND (X360)

Sure, its missions become increasingly tedious. And yeah, the game's story and writing are about as profound as Snooki's autobiography. But WGAF? When you boil it down, the purpose of a video game is to entertain. And *Dead Island* certainly delivers on that front in a big way. Like many a zombie fan, I've often dreamed of what I would do if one day I woke up and discovered that the world had transformed into a hell swarming with the living dead. *Dead Island*'s helped me find my answer: drive around obliterating zombies with my truck just for fun—and occasionally getting out to explode their rotten skulls with a tire iron. All amid the gorgeous scenery of a tropical paradise. —*Patrick Shaw*

WHAT'S MADE ME A ZOMBIE-HUNTING ASTRONAUT

CALL OF DUTY: BLACK OPS—REZURRECTION (DLC)

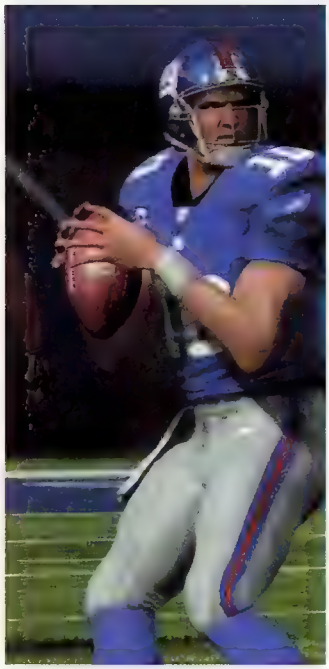
As it's a freezing, eerily desolate landscape only few human beings have actually set foot on, the Moon is rarely taken advantage of as a backdrop for horror stories. And it's odd that around the same time, two different horror stories that take place on the Moon came out: the poorly reviewed (but still very much worth watching) film *Apollo 18*, and the recent expansion to *Call of Duty: Black Ops'* Zombies mode: *Rezurrection*. While the moon map included in the downloadable expansion pack doesn't redefine the experience, it does breathe some new life into it by dropping players into an interesting and atmospheric setting. Where will *COD*'s Zombies take us next? How about a map that drops us in Hell? —*Patrick Shaw*

WHAT ENDS A SCI-FI TRILOGY BRILLIANTLY WITHOUT STORMTROOPER-HELMET XYLOPHONES

GEARS OF WAR 3 (X360)

Gears of War 3 demonstrates how a video game doesn't necessarily need to innovate to be an absolutely riveting experience. And instead of reinventing the wheel, Epic Games has put a tremendous amount of energy into refining the strengths of their cover-based shooter while listening closely to what their fans actually want. While I plowed through *Gears of War 3*'s campaign relatively swiftly, I'm still absolutely hooked on multiplayer modes like Beast and "Horde 2.0." Growing up obsessed with movie monsters—everything from Frankenstein's Monster to Freddy Krueger—I'm finally able to live out my fantasy of experiencing what it's like to walk around as a monster in *Gears 3*'s Beast mode. It feels almost like an entirely different game. —*Patrick Shaw*

WHAT HAS US READY FOR SOME FOOTBALL



MADDEN NFL 12 (X360)

Madden NFL 12 is not a perfect video game by any means. It is still a noticeably glitch-ridden experience, the user interface is questionable at times, and the commentary is downright embarrassing. And yet, thanks to the improved defensive A.I. and new tackling physics, the latest *Madden* video game is such a significant step up from the last entry, *Madden 11*, that I can't help but enjoy it. I guess what this all means is that I'm so hooked on the game of football that I'll play anything to do with the sport, including flawed football titles like *Madden 12*—which is what EA is probably counting on. Whatever. Bring on another season of the sport I love! —*Kat Bailey*

"I DIDN'T ASK FOR THIS"

DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION (X360)

I've been an evangelist for the original *Deus Ex* video game since the first-person RPG debuted back at the turn of the millennium. That said, it should be no surprise that I jumped into Eidos Montreal's cyberpunk prequel, *Human Revolution*, as soon as we got a copy in the *GamePro* office. As much as I love the game's aesthetic (yes, even the over-over-overemphasis on "all orange everything"), I'm discovering that I love Adam Jensen's voice even more. His raspy, guttural growl amuses me endlessly and makes everything he says seem so damn intense and urgent. I'm really hoping there's a mission in the near future where Jensen just sits down and dictates a few audiobooks to kill time. —*Will Herring*

WHAT'S PULLED US AWAY FROM GRAN TURISMO

FORZA 4 (X360)

A lot of racing fans will claim to greatly enjoy both *Forza* and *Gran Turismo*, leaving the major tussle to the fanboys who use the games as stand-ins for their respective consoles. But this fan is fully committing to *Forza* at this point. Turn 10 just does a better job of creating a compelling campaign that introduces you to a stable of well-chosen cars (as opposed to the kitchen-sink approach of *GT*'s car list) and awesomely exotic tracks at an excellent pace. The scalibilty of the game's difficulty is another thing that puts them ahead: It's satisfying for sim fans and newbs alike. *Forza 4* has everything I want in a racing video game—and a whole lot more. —*Tom Price*

GRAN TURISMO AND FORZA HAVE BEEN LOOKED IN A BITTER TUSSLE FOR POLE POSITION FOR YEARS. NOW BOTH FRANCHISES HAVE FIRED THE FINAL SHOTS FOR THIS GENERATION OF CONSOLES. WHO'S THE WINNER?

// GRAN TURISMO 5 //

- ⊕ Amazing array of cars and tracks.
- ⊕ An incredibly realistic driving experience.
- ⊖ Game presentation is out-of-date and clunky.
- ⊖ Online racing and social features are poor.

// FORZA 4 //

- ⊕ Amazing customization options
- ⊕ Tons of interesting races and challenges
- ⊕ Outstanding social and online features
- ⊖ Fewer cars than GT5
- ⊖ Driving engine decent, but not stellar.

THE VERDICT GT5 gets an honorable mention as the best solo racing game, but Forza 4 takes first place thanks to its amazing depth, and the fact that it offers a racing experience that's fun on your own, but truly brilliant online.

NOW PLAYING

NINTENDO

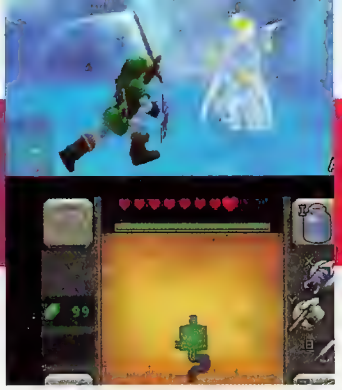
"@MICHAELPACHTER CURIOUS WHY YOU SAY WiiU 'NEEDS COMPELLING 3RD PARTY LAUNCH TITLES' FOR HUGELY SUCCESSFUL LAUNCH. Wii DID IT WITHOUT THAT, NO?"

–MARK MACDONALD
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, 8-4, LTD
VIA TWITTER

WHAT'S JUST AS GOOD AS WE REMEMBER

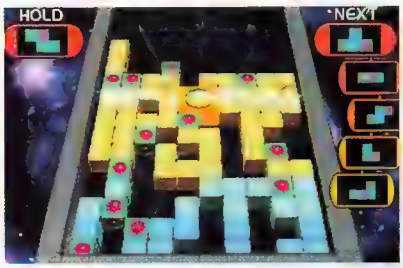
STAR FOX 64 3D (3DS)

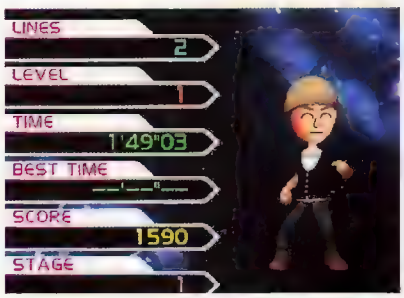
Technically, I've only beaten Kat at *Star Fox 64 3D*—but the aerial battles were so tense and closely contested, I'm prepared to say that I'm the best pilot in the office. Sure, I'd like *Star Fox 64 3D* to have better controls for barrel rolls and U-turns, but everything else feels just like the Nintendo 64 days. In fact, the multiplayer's much better now that the 3D version incorporates random item drops, like cloaking devices and sticky bombs. If only you could play *Star Fox 64 3D* online, it would be one of the best handheld shooters, and not just on the 3DS. But where the heck am I going to find four people with 3DS systems? —*McKinley Noble*



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: OCARINA OF TIME (3DS)

Fact: I originally played The *Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* on Nintendo 64 more than 20 times in 1999. Visiting Hyrule again has been a lot fun, too. Not just because I know how to beat everything, but because it's fun to mess around with the game by doing things out of order. For example, I play *Ocarina of Time* without shields as much as possible. I do the Biggoron Quest as soon as possible, never collect Heart Containers if I can avoid it, and try to kill bosses with stuff like Bombchus. Little things like that make it just as much fun the 21st time around, even when you know every little thing about the game's nooks and crannies. —*McKinley Noble*





WHAT MIGHT BE MILKING IT A BIT

TETRIS AXIS (3DS)

With the excess number of *Tetris* titles now available, it'll probably be easier to find this one than the current "Tetris Holy Grail" for DS and 3DS: 2006's *Tetris DS*. But *Tetris Axis* at least gets the basics right. The regular marathon mode works great, and you can host eight-person competitive matches using just one cart. *Axis* throws in more extra modes than any other *Tetris* game to date, but "more" very rarely means "better." And in this case "more" means "a crapload of things you'll probably want to ignore." If you don't own *Tetris DS*, get this. If you do, then you already have the best *Tetris* available, and you can pass on this one. —*Justin Haywald*

WHAT'S HARDER THAN IT LOOKS

999: NINE HOURS, NINE PERSONS, NINE DOORS (DS)

Getting stuck in a game is really annoying. Getting stuck in a game for two months is downright ridiculous. I decided I wouldn't look up any hints while playing the mature point-and-click adventure *999*. This was clearly a mistake, because I'm not smart enough to figure out one really confusing set of codes. I'll probably cave at some point, because I really want to know what happens next. The premise of the game is surprisingly dark for a DS title: You're trapped on a boat like the *Titanic* with eight other people, and if you can't find your way out in nine hours, everyone dies. People have already exploded...literally, with gore on the walls and terror spreading through every surviving witness. *—Olivia Hubert*

WHAT MAKES US SMILE

KIRBY MASS ATTACK (DS)

I've always loved *Kirby*. Maybe I have a soft spot for him because, like Kirby, I'm also fat and have a big mouth. Or maybe it's because the *Kirby* video games are just grin-inducing fun. *Kirby Mass Attack* has been a blast to play. In the game, Kirby has been chopped up into 10 smaller versions of his pink self. You start with one, and as you eat more fruit, you gain more Kirbys. The stylus controls on the DS are even fun; a flick of the wrist launches the Kirbys into the air. It is a blast to watch a pack of a miniature Kirbys beat up much larger foes. *Kirby Mass Attack* shouldn't be skipped by fans of *fun*. *—Jason Wilson*

WHAT SHOULD ALLEVIATE OUR ZELDA FATIGUE

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: SKYWARD SWORD (Wii)

It's strange that a major *Zelda* release could fly under the radar, but that seems to be the case with *Skyward Sword*. Not even 1-to-1 motion controls are enough to overcome the acute case of *Zelda* burnout that many people feel. But that ought to change once gamers play *Skyward Sword*. While the motion controls are great, the real star of the show is the revamped overworld. The same areas will be revisited multiple times, with new facets of the dungeons uncovered with each trip. The idea is to give gamers the palpable sense of uncovering a world, rather than proceeding through a string of themed dungeons. This *Zelda* seems different so far. Whether that's enough to alleviate the burnout that's afflicted its fans remains to be seen. *—Kat Bailey*

NOW PLAYING

PC

"HE DOESN'T ACTUALLY DO THAT MUCH ANYMORE. HE HAS TWO KIDS AND HIS WIFE WOULD KICK HIM IN THE BUTT IF HE DID THAT."

–TIM WILLITS
LEAD DESIGNER OF RAGE

ON JOHN CARMACK'S OLD HABIT OF LOCKING HIMSELF AWAY AND RETURNING WITH A NEW GAME ENGINE. (VIA EUROGAMER)

WHAT'S KEPT US PLAYING

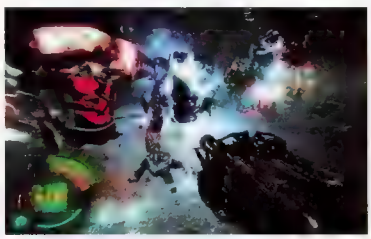
BATTLEFIELD 3

If I had to pinpoint the most striking element of *Battlefield 3*'s multiplayer, it would have to be the game's realism. A lot of that has to do with the exceptionally well-done sound effects—bullets don't just whizz and pop but echo in the distance. It helps create a really unnerving, intense atmosphere. The other reason why your movement through the world is so tense is that your enemies often see you way before you see them, so you'll end up getting sniped from a distance a lot in the beginning. The maps are so open and full of hiding places that, once you get a handle on the different classes, posting up at a key bottleneck and unloading on unsuspecting soldiers becomes easy. *—Chris Holt*

WHAT'S PREPARING US FOR THE ROBOT APOCALYPSE

HARD RESET

As first-person shooters became more sophisticated, I've found myself missing things I loved about games like *Wolfenstein 3-D* and *Doom*: secrets rooms and hordes of challenging foes. And *Hard Reset* has plenty of these. The robots are devious and tough; the smaller ones sneak around or blow up in your face, while the larger ones bull-rush into you at every opportunity or duck behind walls and other obstacles as they fire missiles at you. The best part is using computer terminals and explosive barrels against these metallic monsters—a well-placed shot can decimate the death-dealing robots. The game ends up being a blast (pun intended), and I'm eager to see what else developer Flying Wild Hog has to offer. *—Jason Wilson*



WHAT'S BUGGING THE HELL OUT OF ME

POKÉMON TRADING CARD GAME ONLINE

In competitive play, every *Pokémon* video game has a list of banned Pokémon you can't use. Typically, this involves "Legendary" Pokémon or those with overpowered move pools, like Blaziken or Garchomp. More than anything, the *Pokémon Trading Card Game Online* needs a ban list—not because I suck or anything, but because Legendaries really wreck a battle. For the most part, I like *Pokémon TGC Online*: Virtual card battles are fun, and the game's really self-explanatory. Most of the character/avatar art sucks, but that's not the biggest problem. I'm just sick of my Eevee evolutions getting murdered by a Zekrom that barely requires any energy to attack (and comes with craploads of HP to boot). Screw Legendaries, man. *—McKinley Noble*

WHAT MAKES US WANT TO CAST "MAGIC MISSILE"

HEROES OF NEVERWINTER (FACEBOOK)

Some of my favorite games of the late 1980s/early 1990s are the "Gold Box" *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* dungeon-crawls from SSI. My favorite aspect of those games is the turn-based combat, something that's sadly disappeared from most modern RPGs. So I'm quite pleased to see that turn-based combat is at the heart of *Heroes of Neverwinter*, the Facebook game based on the 4th Edition *D&D* rules. So far, I'm really enjoying the turn-based combat. And as each scenario grades you on your performance, it's really about more than just attacking each turn—you really need to think strategically and use your abilities to their fullest. It's nice to see more depth come to Facebook gaming, especially after my distaste for *Civilization: World*. —*Jason Wilson*

WHAT LOOKS & SOUNDS GOOD BUT FALLS SHORT

BRAID

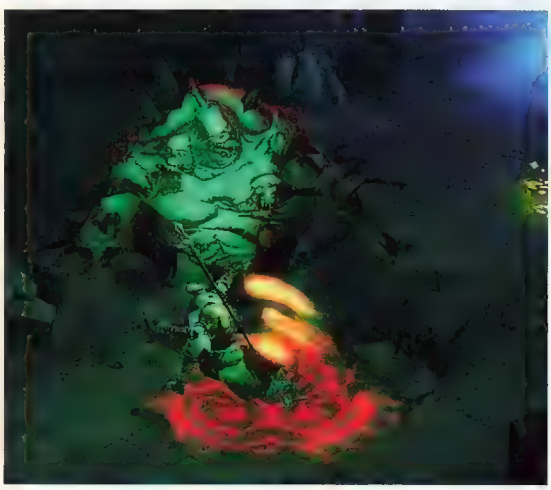
Recently offered on sale in an indie bundle on Steam, *Braid* has received some fantastic reviews. And as soon as I got started, I was smitten. The 2D graphics are gushing with color and movement, reflecting a fantasy world of the mind where morality is questions and a man searches for the love he's lost. The music is even better—something like Elven Renaissance music with a slight Celtic twist that goes into the ears like sugar on the tongue. Sadly, I haven't been able to play it more than 20 minutes at a time. Even with the sci-fi addition of time travel that functions to avoid death while also incorporating elements of a platform puzzler, *Braid* is a game I'd rather watch than play. —*Olivia Hubert*

WHAT'S NOT PERFECT... BUT STILL A DAMN GOOD TIME

RAGE

Yes, there were some early stutters for PC gamers to get their game running at its full potential (especially ATI users), but hopefully those issues have been completely ironed out by the time you're reading this. And yes, the story and it's so-called ending could have used a lot more work. But I'll be damned if I haven't kept going back to *Rage*, despite its shortcomings. There's something very pure and good about its shooter mechanics, something you'd expect from the people who practically invented the first-person shooter. *Rage* might have had a hard time living up to its lofty expectations, but there are so many moments of sheer awesomeness in the game (I'm looking at you, sentry bots) that I can't help but forgive its transgressions. —*Tom Price*

WHAT MAKES ME WANT THE FULL GAME...NOOWWW!



DIABLO 3 (BETA)

I have been playing overhead-viewed dungeon-crawlers for eons, and I have enjoyed pretty much every step of their evolution from stick graphics to what now represents the cutting edge of the genre: *Diablo III*. My recent experience with the *Diablo III* beta hammered home two things: How freakin' amazing this new game looks and plays, and how much I want to play it RIGHT NOW. I just cannot wait to finally sink my teeth in the final version of Blizzard's long-anticipated sequel: it's slick, action-packed, and brilliantly put together. I am definitely taking a sick day or two when(ever) Blizzard rolls out the final version of *Diablo III*. —*Jaz Rignall*

NOW PLAYING

MOBILE

"I REALLY THINK STEVE JOBS WAS ONE OF THE GREATEST PEOPLE TO LIVE IN OUR TIME. A CHILD BORN TODAY ONWARD WILL GROW UP IN A WORLD FULL OF iPHONES AND iPADS AND WILL SEE STEVE JOBS AS MY GENERATION SAW WINSTON CHURCHILL OR ALBERT EINSTEIN."

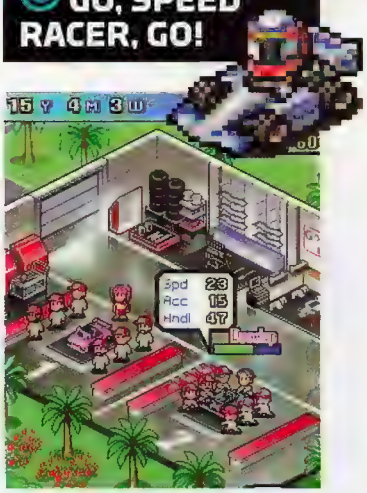
-TIM SWEENEY,
CEO OF EPIC GAMES

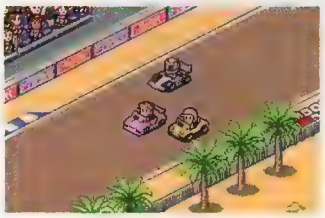
WHAT'S SO GOOD I ACTUALLY SPENT MY MONEY ON IT

FLICK SOCCER (iPHONE/iPAD)

I'm totally hooked on this iPad free-kick game. You use well-timed, well-weighted flicks of the finger to "kick" a ball and score goals. Depending on how you flick, and indeed how you "after touch" the ball with an additional swipe while it's in flight, you can shoot with the accuracy of a Brazilian dead-all specialist—assuming you have the skills. The game could be called pricey at $5, but I bought it as an impulse purchase late one night with my own cash, and think it was money well spent. It's a perfect pick-up-and-play game that has a knack of getting you into a zone of concentration that helps you forget about everything else for a few minutes. And that's what a great game is all about.
—Jaz Rignall

GO, SPEED RACER, GO!





GRAND PRIX STORY (iPHONE/iPAD, ANDROID)

Another month, another solid week lost to one of Kairosoft's "Story" games. The latest to hit is *Grand Prix Story*, a sim-management title that tasks you with building up your own racing team from last-place losers to high-octane heroes. What makes *Grand Prix Story* so darn engaging is how insanely deep this little app is; you can research new vehicles, upgrade specific stats and vehicle parts, hire and train custom repair crews and drivers, and even apply for cash-granting sponsorships to help fund your trek to the top of the podium. *Grand Prix Story* is way too, fun, and *way* too addicting, and I recommend it to anyone who's a fan of Kairosoft's work.
—Will Herring

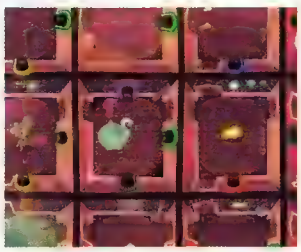
WHAT WE JUST COULDN'T SAY NO TO

THE SECRET OF MANA (iPHONE/iPAD)

Man, I swore up and down that I'd never buy a Square Enix game for my iPhone. Not only do they overcharge for them, but the ports aren't even priced competitively enough to dissuade me from the slightly more expensive PSP or Game Boy Advance versions. Still, I caved. *Secret of Mana* has always been one of my favorite RPGs, and I actually fell into some free iTunes money. Sure, the touch-screen buttons featured in *The Secret of Mana* for iPhone suck, but it's cool to have such a good, classic game in my pocket. But never again, Square. Got it?! Now go finish the *Final Fantasy VII* remake you're not making, you bastards. And bring me *Kingdom Hearts 3* next year, too. *—McKinley Noble*

WHAT WILL TIDE ME OVER UNTIL THE NEXT METAL GEAR GAME

SPY MOUSE (iPHONE/iPAD, ANDROID)



The people behind one of my favorite mobile games of the last few years—*Flight Control*—have a new game built around tracking a little path with your finger that guides something to safety. Instead of trying to land planes on runways without crashing them into each other, *Spy Mouse* tasks you with guiding a mouse to the cheese and out the door without getting pounced on by a cat. It sounds simple, but the increasing difficulty of the levels and the evolving abilities of the cats makes it an unusually tough challenge for such a cute game. *Spy Mouse* has that great combination of action and puzzle-solving that great stealth-oriented games like *Metal Gear Solid* demand. —*Tom Price*

WHAT'S LEAVING WEIRD FINGERPRINT PATTERNS ON MY IPHONE

ELECTROMASTER (iPHONE/iPAD)

Will introduced me to this quirky retro shooter not long ago, and ever since, I've been splitting my time between this and *Grand Prix Story*. *Electromaster*'s retro graphics and one-touch gameplay are pretty disarming, though, because this game is hard. Hard, hard, hard. Trying to keep away from enemies in order to charge up the 8-bit girl's beam is tough, and the way the later levels keep throwing bigger waves at you is pretty harsh. Still, it's a great game for just $1. But be warned—you're not going to beat *Electromaster*. Try as I might, I just can't see how it's humanly possible to complete the game. Yeah, it's *that* hard. —*McKinley Noble*

WHAT'S KEPT US PLAYING

DRAW RACE 2 (iPHONE/iPAD)

I love the high-octane action twitch-factor of racing games, but as a deeper fan of motorsports, I'm also well aware that car racing is a lot more than just gas, brakes, and steering wheel. Good racers are careful about the lines they take through turns, trying to find the perfect speed to power through quickly without losing control. *Draw Race 2* is simply about that "choosing the best driving line" aspect of racing games—but from an overhead view and prerace. You draw your line and then watch your car go, occasionally bumping him forward with a turbo boost. It's an insanely addictive experience for folks who like racing games but maybe don't feel like gripping the wheel for 24 Hours of Le Mans.
—*Tom Price*

WHAT'S A LOT OF READING

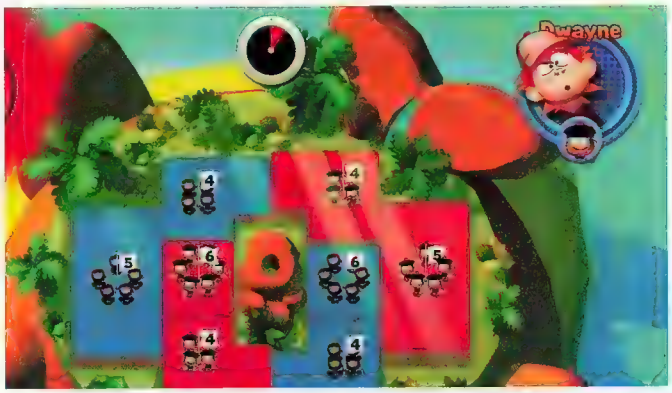
KING OF DRAGON PASS (iPHONE/iPAD)

King of Dragon Pass is one of those oddities of PC game development that can't be easily pigeonholed into a category; it's part "Choose Your Own Adventure" book and part management sim, all told with hand-drawn visuals (no animations!). You lead your clan as you seek to become the dominant power in *Dragon Pass,* making decisions on how to allocate resources and magic, whether to attack nearby clans, or defending against raiders and other nasties. It's certainly not a traditional game, and it's definitely not going to appeal to everyone. But if you like managing a culture to supremacy and don't care as much about action and explosions, *King of Dragon Pass* may be for you. —*Jason Wilson*

BEST COMBO SINCE PEANUT BUTTER AND CHOCOLATE

QUARREL (iPHONE/iPAD)

Who knew that the mix of *Scrabble* and *Risk* could be so fun? While on a cruise to Alaska, I entertained my seasick wife with this fun (and difficult!) word game. *Quarrel*'s basics are simple—you engage in word battles with A.I. characters, who exhibit different traits and mastery of the English language. You get a set of letters, and you can make a word based on how many soldiers (cartoonish blokes such as aliens, pirates, or robots) you have on your space. Like *Scrabble*, each letter has a point value. And if you tie, the one who got the word quicker wins (my one compliant—the A.I. characters seem too fast at times). Best of all, it has daily challenges, so it always gives you something new to play. —*Jason Wilson*

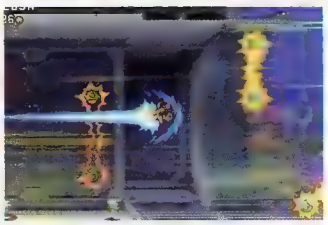


I'D BUY IT FOR FREE

VIDRHYTHM (iPHONE/iPAD)

The idea behind *VidRhythm* is fun: You record yourself (or your friends) making silly voices and noises, then the program turns them into mini music videos. Unfortunately, it gets tiresome a little too quickly. All of the tracks are original creations or public domain songs that aren't particularly catchy. And once you've gone through a couple, and then made up your own rendition of a song featuring curse words or some other lewd addition, it's easy to put it down and forget about. The tracks aren't long, but even their over-a-minute run times seem a little lengthy for what's, basically, a quick, silly joke. This is, however, the perfect app for bugging someone who's quietly trying to get important work done in the office. —*Justin Haywald*

WHAT'S AWESOMELY OVER-THE-TOP



JETPACK JOYRIDE (iPHONE/iPAD, ANDROID)

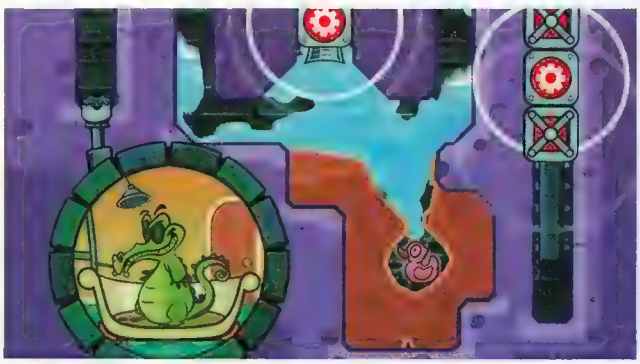
Like many on-the-go gamers, I spent many-a-morning commute blasting past baddies in Halfbrick's *Monster Dash* when it was first released, and I let out an audible squeal of delight whenever foul-mouthed hero Barry Steakfries came into possession of the Machine Gun Jetpack. *Jetpack Joyride*, a similar side-scroller based almost entirely around that wonderful weapon, cranks said delight (and the concept's inherent absurdity) up to 11. You steer Barry through a constantly scrolling laboratory, dodging levitating lasers, static "zappers," and murderous missiles, all aiming to take the hero down while he hopes to complete a grab-bag of challenges. It's far too fun, and it has made me miss more bus stops than I'd care to admit. —*Will Herring*

WHAT'S SCRATCHING THAT RPG ITCH (YOU SHOULD GET THAT CHECKED, BY THE WAY)

ZENONIA 3 (iPHONE/iPAD, ANDROID)

Zenonia 3 is a whole lot of game for almost no cost. While many 99-cent apps are shallow timewasters, *Zenonia 3* offers a full 16-bit-style RPG experience on your mobile device. And while it's not perfect—a shaky localiztion from the original Korean, an interface that's a little too small, and the usual problems with touch-screen joypad emulation mar the experience slightly—it offers a lengthy main quest with a ton of optional content, including online multiplayer battles and competitive leaderboards. It also offers a considerable amount of replay value, with the four character classes all playing very differently from one another. Given the choice between spending 99 cents on this or the ubiquitous *Angry Birds*, I know what I'd choose every time. —*Pete Davison*

WHY THE HELL AM I STILL PLAYING THIS?



WHERE'S MY WATER (iPHONE/iPAD)

Disney's *Where's My Water* made a splash in the mobile-gaming space by passing up Rovio's *Angry Birds* on the charts last September. At first, I couldn't really fathom how this happened—after all, it's not really anything we haven't already seen before (See: *Feed Me Oil*)...but I was wrong to doubt *Where's My Water*'s appeal. You guide a stream of pipe water to a filthy alligator named Swampy, whom you must bathe. As you might expect, you must also navigate Swampy's bathwater through various obstructions and hazards. I know; it sounds ridiculous. But just as *Angry Birds*, *Cut the Rope*, and countless other puzzle-based iOS timewasters suck you into their vortex, I'm absolutely glued to this simple but charming iPhone gem. —*Patrick Shaw*

WHAT'S BECOME OUR LATEST iPHONE OBSESSION

ZOMBIE HIGHWAY (iPHONE/iPAD)

Sometimes, the simplest video-game concepts also make for the most engrossing gaming experiences. This is especially true of many titles you'll find on iTunes. *Zombie Highway*, my latest iOS infatuation, is exactly what it sounds like: a game where you drive along a highway infested with the undead. Zombies jump on to the sides of your vehicle, and you must blast them with everything in your arsenal—from weapons such as assault rifles and shotguns to the more exotic harpoon guns and tranquilizers—to keep them from tipping over your ride. *Zombie Highway* might sound like a title that grows old fast, but as you can unlock new weapons, vehicles (like a Hummer), and even more challenging maps to keep you hooked. It's a must-play for zombie buffs with an iOS device. —*Patrick Shaw*

"STEVE JOBS. A GREAT, GREAT MAN. THERE'S A HOLE IN EVERY GEEK'S HEART TONIGHT. ...HAVEN'T BEEN HEARTBROKEN BY THE DEATH OF A CELEBRITY SINCE JOHN LENNON."

–KEN LEVINE, COFOUNDER OF IRRATIONAL GAMES

WHAT'S ON MY... iPHONE

TOM PRICE

Even though I spend about 98 percent of my iPhone gaming time on only two or three games, I like to have a full buffet of games to choose from at any time.

I LOVE A GOOD MANAGEMENT SIM, AND THESE ARE THREE OF MY FAVES.

WELL, ***TINY TOWER*** IS MORE OF A WORKAHOLIC SIM, BUT THAT STILL WORKS.

I PLAY ***DROP7*** MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE: WAITING IN LINE OR FOR THE BUSS OR IN THE ELEVATOR. IT SOOTHES ME.

I THINK I JUST KEEP ***INFINITY BLADE*** ON HERE SO I CAN SHOW PEOPLE HOW AWESOME GRAPHICS HAVE GOTTEN FOR THE iOS.

I #SWEAR I'LL GET AROUND TO PLAYING #SWORCERY ONE OF THESE DAYS.

SCRAMBLE WAS ONE OF MY FIRST REAL ADDICTIONS ON THE IPHONE. I PREFER THOSE KIND OF WORD GAMES OVER ***WORDS WITH FRIENDS***.

SUPER STICKMAN GOLF IS STILL ONE OF THE BEST MULTIPLAYER GAMES TO PLAY ON A ROAD TRIP OR ON THE BUS, AS LONG AS A FEW FRIENDS ARE WILLING TO GET CAR SICK WITH YOU.

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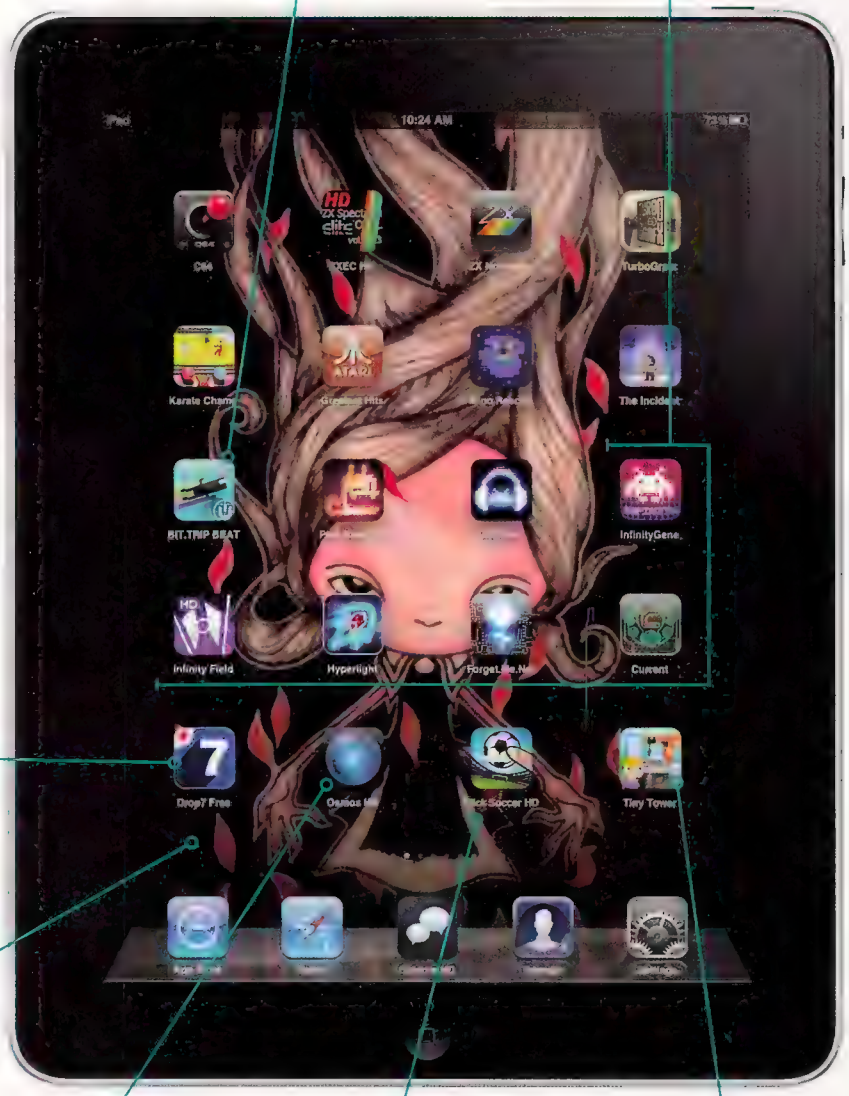
WHAT'S ON MY... iPAD

JAZ RIGNALL

I have many, many pages of Apps on my iPad–this one is where I put all my retro and modern retro-inspired arcade games.

THESE COOL MUSIC-DRIVEN ARCADE GAMES FOCUS MORE ON RHYTHM THAN REFLEXES.

I LOVE RETRO-INSPIRED SHOOTERS WITH A MODERN TWIST—THESE (PARTICULARLY THE TWO ***INFINITY*** GAMES) ARE MY FAVORITES.



DROP7 IS THE BEST-KEPT SECRET IN GAMING. IT'S A SIMPLE BUT BRILLIANT PUZZLE GAME THAT RIVALS *TETRIS* FOR ADDICTIVENESS.

DESKTOP: THIS IS A SCAN OF AN ORIGINAL PAINTING BY JOHNNY SIU THAT I BOUGHT DURING HIS THYLACINE CIRCUS EXHIBITION AT FABRIC 8 IN SAN FRANCISCO LAST YEAR.

OSMOS IS A BEAUTIFULLY CHILL ARCADE GAME: ONE OF THE BEST ON iPAD.

FLICK SOCCER PUTS BECKHAM IN YOUR FINGERTIPS.

TINY TOWER IS AN IDIOT HAMSTER WHEEL GAME—LOTS OF ACTIVITY THAT GETS YOU NOWHERE. BUT I AM OBSESSED WITH IT.

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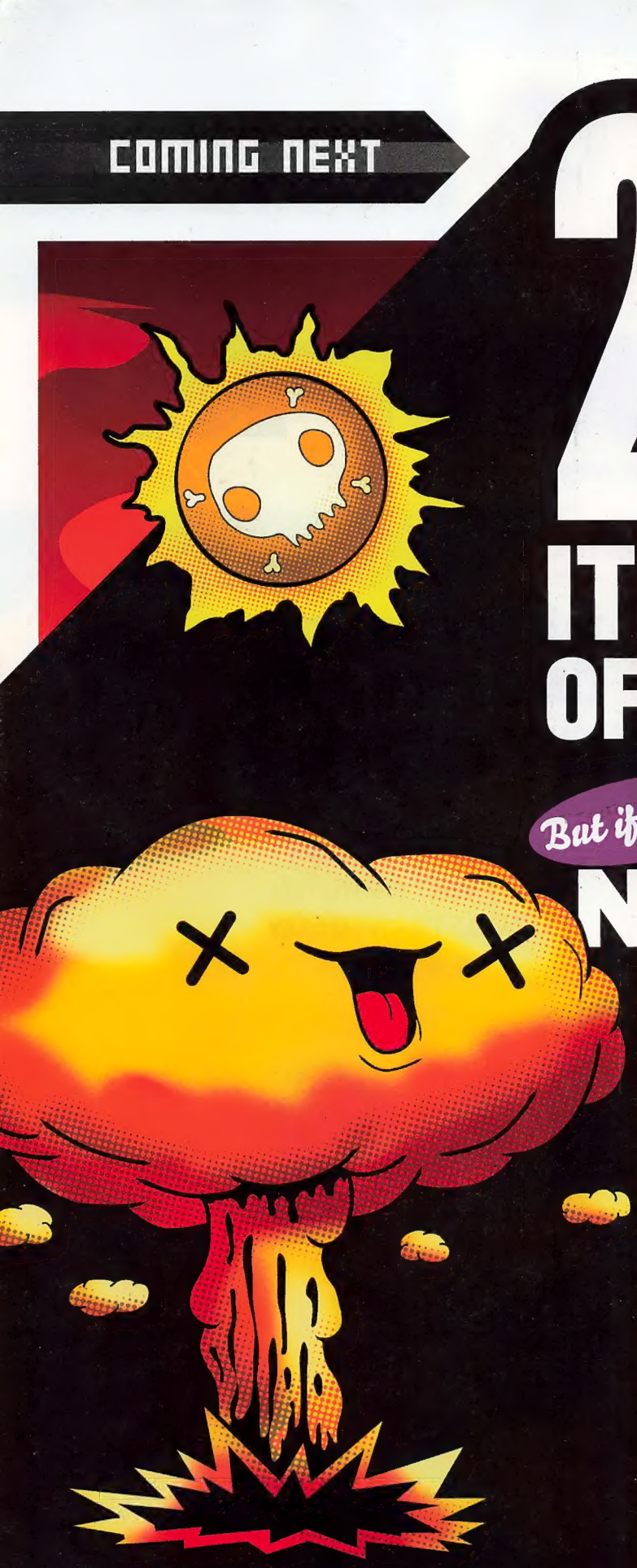
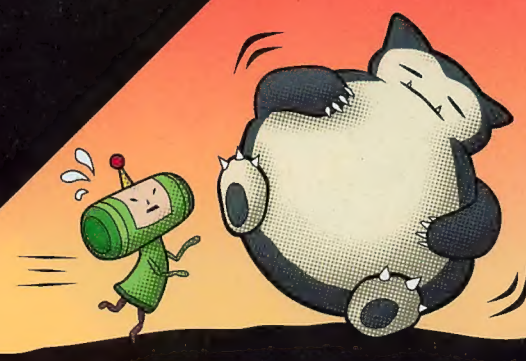
But if not... SEE YOU NEXT TIME.

— GAMEPRO





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Strong Language
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